

**COMMUNAL TRADITION AND THE NATURE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AMONG  
THE PREHISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS OF EL HATILLO (HE-4), PANAMA**

by

William A. Locascio

B.S., Loyola University Chicago, 1996

M.A., Southern Illinois University, 2003

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This dissertation was presented

by

William A. Locascio

It was defended on

May 4, 2010

and approved by

Dr. Olivier de Montmollin, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology

Dr. Marc Bermann, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology

Dr. Mikael J. Haller, Assistant Professor, St. Francis Xavier University

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Robert D. Drennan, Distinguished Professor, Department of  
Anthropology

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William A. Locascio, Ph. D.

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Prehispanic chiefdoms of Central Panama provide interesting cases for investigating why societies first began to organize themselves hierarchically and why members began to relate to one-another in ways that emphasized the relative status of each. The particular activities through which a small number of individuals elevated their social status above the majority of a population, gaining influence over them, and the broader social circumstances that permitted this transformation are critical to understanding processes that lead to the emergence of social inequality. This dissertation presents data from archaeological excavations of households at the village of El Hatillo/He-4 –the principal political center of a prehispanic chiefdom that existed in the Río Parita Valley of Central Panama between about A.D 700 and A.D. 1522. These data and the patterns they reveal provide a basis for comparison of domestic activities and contexts across time within El Hatillo/He-4. Identifying differences in households (observed synchronically and diachronically), like the organization of space and activities that were undertaken within, is among the best ways to understand why certain groups were socially more important and influential than others. The Río Parita chiefdom, like most, also consisted of multiple villages socially unified under an elite leader, or chief, forming a more-or-less cohesive political unit, or chiefdom. Thus, principles of social organization and bases of authority extended beyond relationships among households at El Hatillo/He-4 to also include larger communities and outlying villages. Since household data do not permit us to understand interactions among groups across the village, let alone other villages in the polity, as clearly, the data presented in this

dissertation are interpreted alongside data collected at the community scale (Menzies 2009), representing interactions among all communities within El Hatillo/He-4, and data collected at the regional scale (Haller 2008), representing interactions among villages within the chiefdom. Patterns from all scales of analysis – Household, Community, and Regional – come together to provide a complete basis for interpreting change as it occurred at all levels of social interaction. This permits precise conclusions about the emergence of inequality and the nature of social change in the Río Parita valley that are reported in this dissertation.

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## **PREFACE**

The reader of this dissertation should note two important points with regard to its organization and content. First, this dissertation is accompanied by an online dataset in the University of Pittsburgh's Comparative Archaeology Database, which can be accessed directly at the following URL: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu). The online dataset contains all original data, including ceramic, lithic, and faunal inventories, as well as detailed descriptions of stratigraphy from important contexts and associated profile drawings. This written portion of the dissertation provides a discussion section for each of the six areas in which excavations were undertaken by the project (Chapters 2-7), with the introductory chapter outlining the research questions, and the concluding chapter serving to draw together the patterns from each individual area of excavation in order to address the research questions defined at the outset. While the information presented in this written portion is sufficient for understanding the conclusions, the bases for these conclusions will not be clear if the data in the online dataset, particularly stratigraphic descriptions, are not also examined.

Second, the data for this dissertation were collected during household level excavations that formed the third phase of a larger investigation of a small, prehispanic chiefly society. This larger investigation – Proyecto Arqueológico Río Parita (PARP) – included three independently funded and organized projects. A regional scale survey (Haller 2008), which covered 104 sq km along the Río Parita in Central Panama and identified and investigated the settlement system that

existed as part of this chiefdom, including the central place of El Hatillo/He-4, and a community scale study (Menzies 2009), which carried out intensive survey at the central place of El Hatillo/He-4 and extensively tested the site with sixty 1 sq m excavations, constituted the first two phases. Household level excavations comprised the third stage of investigation and followed-up on the previous two by focusing attention at the finer scales of social interaction. This scale of investigation utilized data gathered at the broader scales to formulate specific research questions and guide excavation of households. This dissertation makes frequent necessary reference to results from both broader scales of investigation, particularly Menzies (2009), and attempts to place a finer point on some of the patterns noted at those scales, while also seeking to understand social inequality as it existed in daily interactions among the households of El Hatillo/He-4. The author recommends that the reader of this dissertation also consult Haller (2008) and Menzies (2009) to fully understand the conclusions presented in this dissertation. Finally, it should be noted that although both Haller (2008) and Menzies (2009) refer to the principal site in the Río Parita Valley primarily as He-4, this dissertation has chosen to refer to the site by the commonly known name, El Hatillo. To be sure, these refer to the same site (which has also been called Finca Juan Calderon!).

Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without grants from the National Science Foundation (Dissertation Improvement Grant #0735043), the Center for Latin American Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, and without the kind assistance of Panama's Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INAC) and the community of Palo Grande, Panama (particularly the Flores and Peres families). A host of generous and very smart people were also constantly helping to make this dissertation possible with advice, suggestions, encouragement, and helpful critiques of ideas. Dr. Robert D. Drennan, the dissertation advisor

and committee chair, has been most helpful with this process from start to finish, and the project simply would not have happened at any stage without him. Committee members Dr. Marc Bermann, Dr. Olivier de Montmollin, and Dr. Mikael Haller have all provided time and thoughtful comments on this dissertation, and each has contributed ideas that have become very important elements in this dissertation. Drs. Scott Palumbo and Adam Menzies have also given very freely of their time in contributing to this dissertation, from laboring in the field to providing thoughtful advice. Dr. Sarah Taylor, has been the constant moral support for the trying times in this process, but has been equally important for her willingness to listen and offer valuable ideas and input to the project at every step. Finally, Dr. Richard Cooke, whose indefatigable research over the past four decades in Panama archaeology constitutes a cornerstone for any scholarly work on Central American prehistory, has provided help in numerous ways to this dissertation process (including giving freely of his time to perform preliminary analysis on the faunal collection!). It should be noted that Dr. Cooke has served as a committee member throughout this dissertation process, but for personal reasons was unable to attend the defense and thus could not be officially listed.

The help of all of these individuals, and countless others not named here, is greatly appreciated and recognized for the essential contributions that they have made.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION: GOALS AND METHODS OF HOUSEHOLD EXCAVATION AT EL HATILLO**

Chiefdoms, known variously as trans-egalitarian, middle-range, and ranked societies, represent societies at the threshold of complexity, and provide an important context for studying the origins of institutionalized inequality among humans (Gilman 1991:146). The virtual extinction of such societies in the modern world has placed the task of studying chiefdoms squarely in the realm of archaeology where attention to long-term processes of social change allows investigation of the mechanisms by which hierarchies emerged (Drennan and Uribe 1987). Ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts lend themselves readily to this research, providing a base of classic data and informing ideas about the emergence of inequality (Fried 1967; Oberg 1955; Sahlins 1963; Service 1962), while material remains from multiple scales of analysis offer the archaeologist appropriate clues from which to reconstruct the processes and conditions of social change.

How and why some human societies, after successfully living as politically egalitarian groups for millennia, began to develop systems of ranking remains a fundamental question in advancing our understanding of social change (Carneiro 1981; Drennan and Uribe 1987; Earle 1991; Johnson and Earle 1987 [2000]; McIntosh 1999; Price and Feinman 1995; Redmond 1998; Sanders and Webster 1978). Social processes that led to hierarchically organized societies effectively enabled leaders to bind followers to themselves through the manipulation of various

social institutions. Studies have demonstrated that strategies aimed at obtaining political power ranged from control of labor and production to control of the principles of legitimacy, and included a long list of specific activities that fall under the broader headings of economy, ideology, and warfare (Earle 1991:5). Precisely how these strategies were carried out within particular cases and how local conditions affected their success or failure provides the basis for understanding the processes through which social complexity emerged and was sustained. Thus, identifying these strategies from the material remains of the societies that produced them represents an obvious and important step toward understanding inequality and its origins; yet, this alone is not sufficient. Of crucial importance are the circumstances under which various strategies worked to bring about change in prehistoric societies (Drennan 1991, 1995; Earle 1991, 1997; Price and Feinman 1995; Spencer 1987, 1998). The physical environment, social and cultural constraints, and the resources available to competitors for power have greater potential bearing on advancing knowledge of the emergence of social inequality than do the specific strategies employed in these processes (Drennan 1995:331). Appropriate reconstruction of the conditions of social change, then, accounts not only for the strategies of building political power, but also for the social, cultural, and physical circumstances that permitted hierarchies to emerge. It follows that the specific trajectories of chiefly development vary from case to case, and comparison of these trajectories permit observation of consistencies among cases in the conditions that led to the emergence of inequality (Drennan 1995). Analyses of this sort drive archaeology toward broader scientific explanations of the forces of social change and advance conclusions to a more general level (Drennan 1991, 1995).

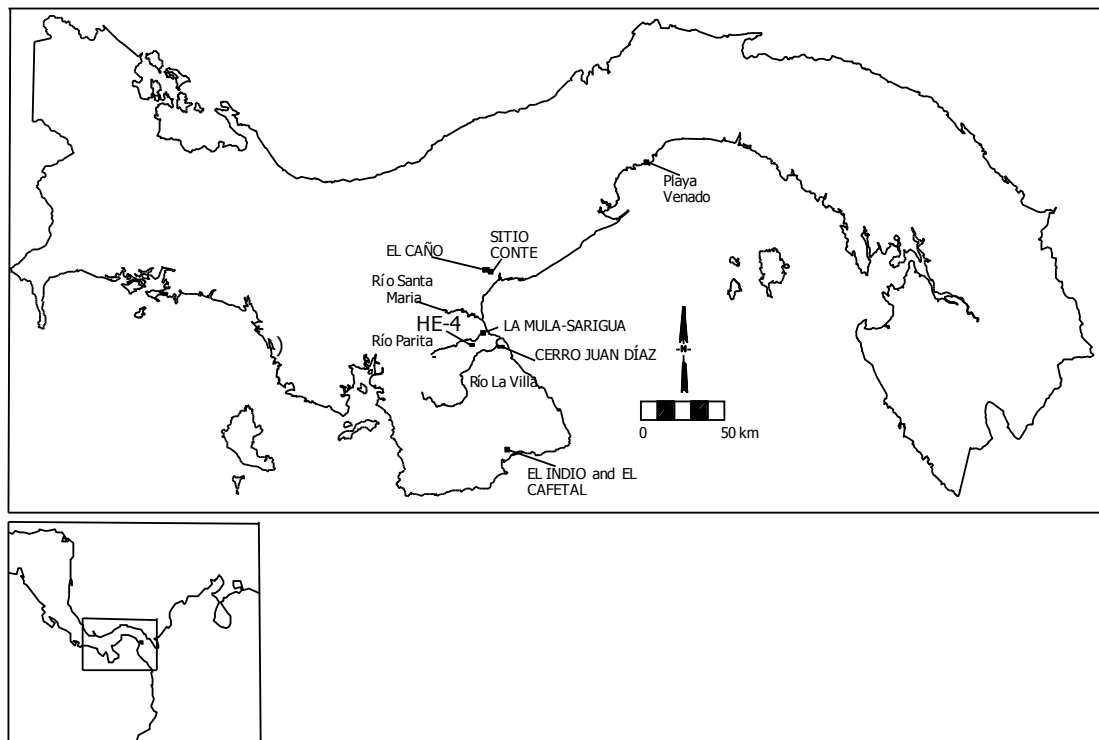
Chiefdoms are best understood in terms of the principles by which they were organized regionally, as well as the principles that guided daily social interaction within the communities



and households that comprised them. Data from each level of society must contribute to the overall interpretation of chiefdoms; indeed, it is widely held that multi-scalar datasets provide the analytical context necessary to meaningfully identify and interpret patterns of changing social organization (Earle 1991; Flannery 1976; Kowalewski 1990; Lathrap et al. 1977; Roosevelt 1987; Spencer 1987, 1998; Wright 1977). Broad-scale investigations aimed at assessing settlement systems within a region reflect aspects of supra-local social organization such as centrally-arranged, multi-village hierarchies. Community and household scale analyses shift the focus to the site. Patterns that reflect the bases for particular kinds of social interaction, be they economic (craft production, resource procurement, agriculture) or ideological (ritual performance, esoteric knowledge), emerge at the community scale, and provide the basis for assessing the composition and function of these societies. These activities can in turn be investigated more narrowly at the household level to elucidate the behaviors and decisions that effected social change. Thus, artifacts and features that comprise household assemblages supply the means to reconstruct behaviors that shaped activities within the community (Drennan 1976:236). Thus, the investigation of chiefdoms and the various developmental trajectories they follow requires the application of multilevel research designs (Roosevelt 1987; Spencer 1982, 1987, 1998:106; Wright 1977).

Opportunities to carry out such investigations present important prospects for studying social change. Recent archaeological work in central Panama presents one such case. Regional-level investigation in the Rio Parita Valley (Haller 2008) (Figure 1.1) identified a hierarchical arrangement of sites indicative of political integration (i.e. settlement hierarchy) clustered around the chiefly center of El Hatillo/El Hatillo (hereafter, El Hatillo). Subsequent survey and test excavation of El Hatillo (Menziés 2009) provided evidence of control over stone axe production,

one sort of activity that could have defined community integration and interaction and supported a chiefly elite. Excavation of individual households at El Hatillo (Locascio 2007) then provided higher resolution spatial and temporal data, permitting the reconstruction of patterns of social interaction among domestic units within particular occupational phases that enabled investigators to better understand how behaviors among individual households, such as axe production, operated within the broader social institutions they supported.



**Figure 1.1. Map of the known archaeological sites of Central Panama. From Menzies 2009.**

## **1.1 SOCIAL COMPLEXITY IN CENTRAL PACIFIC PANAMA**

Ethnohistoric accounts of sixteenth century indigenous groups in central Panama (Andagoya 1945; Espinosa 1994a, 1994b; Las Casas 1986; Oviedo 1944) have informed the literature concerning chiefly societies in the Americas from early on (Helms 1979; Oberg 1955; Steward and Faron 1959). Some Accounts describe paramount chiefs who held political and military sway over commoner populations and enjoyed special treatment in life and death (i.e. ostentatious personal adornment; enormous wealth; elaborate burials) (Oviedo 1944). Archaeological data collected during early excavation of burials at Sitio Conte (Lothrop 1937, 1942; Mason 1942) and El Hatillo (Ladd 1964), and evidence from recent investigations at the site (Hansell 1987, 1988; Cooke 1984; Cooke et al. 2003) and regional scales (Haller 2008; Isaza 2007; Cooke and Ranere 1984) corroborate such ethnohistoric descriptions and point to a system of ranking that was firmly in place in the region by 750 A.D.

### **1.1.1 Social Complexity in the Ethnohistoric and Archaeological Records**

The archaeological record for central Panama shows that sedentary populations emerged along the coast at Monagrillo ca. 2500 B.C., and were followed by the appearance of maize-producing settlements situated primarily within floodplains by approximately 200 B.C. (Cooke 1984; Drennan 1991; Haller 2008; Hansell 1987, 1988). Mortuary evidence collected from a number of sites around central Panama with occupations dating to the early centuries A.D. (e.g. Sitio Sierra, El Indio I) suggests that variability in burials were based primarily on sex and occupation, rather than status, pointing to a largely egalitarian social order in which prestige was achieved (Cooke 1984:287). Hansell (1987:128), however, has argued that burials from this same period at La

Mula-Sarigua display differential treatment of the dead. Individuals interred with funerary offerings in tombs excavated into bedrock and situated a short distance from the site contrast with others interred in less formal ways (i.e. midden burials and bundles containing disarticulated bones).

Elaborate burials from Sitio Conte (Lothrop 1937, 1942; Mason 1942; see also Briggs 1989, 1993; Hearne and Sharer 1992; Linares 1977) and the Río Parita Valley site of El Hatillo (Ladd 1964; see also Haller 2008) began late in the first millennium A.D. and display marked divergences from earlier mortuary patterns (Cooke 2004, 2005; Cooke et al. 2000). Considerable wealth is suggested by the offerings recovered from these burials, which included accumulations of finely worked shell, bone, and metal (Cooke 1984:287; Linares 1977:38-43). In each case, bodies were interred beneath artificially constructed mounds, reflecting an ability to mobilize cooperative labor. Several such tombs, primarily from Sitio Conte, contained the remains of multiple individuals; in these cases, luxury goods were typically concentrated upon a single individual, who was often partially sheltered and seated within the tomb and accompanied by up to twenty additional bodies, suggesting (based on ethnographic analogy) the sacrifice of wives and retainers (Lothrop 1937; 1942; Mason 1942; see also Cooke 1984, 2003).

The image of pre-Columbian central Panama that has emerged from the ethnohistoric record is equally suggestive of social hierarchy. Reports of rulers capable of assembling large armies to wage war against neighboring or nearby polities and large stores of resources linked to regional exchange attest to individual authority and leadership (Espinosa 1994a, 1994b; Oviedo 1944). Conspicuous displays of wealth, in the form of painted regalia, jewelry and ornaments, and weaponry, denoted elites, such as chief Parita (París), whom the Spaniards observed armored in gold and adorned with necklaces in preparation for burial, and being accompanied to the grave

by retainers and wives (Jopling 1994:63-64; Oviedo 1944). The authority and influence associated with such treatment in death was, according to Spanish accounts, derived from the ability of chiefs, or *queví*s, to mobilize warriors (*cabras*) for battle with nearby polities (Linares 1977). These chiefs, it appears, wielded authority over local level sub-chiefs (*sacos*), who in turn controlled village populations within the larger confederacy (Helms 1994; Linares 1977). Unfortunately, inadequate attention is given in the ethnohistoric record to the details of how these social networks were organized and operated. Alongside warfare, the chroniclers emphasized trade and exchange as an activity of pronounced importance (Oviedo 1944). Salt, cotton, dogs, dried fish, maize, gold ore and finished gold, and slaves are reported as items that were traded in networks that spanned the region of modern Panama (Espinosa 1994a, 1994b; Haller 2008; Linares 1977; Oviedo 1944). Again, however, little information was collected by the Spaniards with regard to the organization and social impact of activities involved in exchange, despite mention of craft production (e.g. cotton and textiles, ceramics) in the ethnohistoric record. Nonetheless, subsistence resources and territory are reported as foci of conflict by the chroniclers and domination of these apparently were central to chiefly authority at the time of contact (Linares 1977:73).

### **1.1.2 Models of Social and Political Change in Central Panama**

Efforts to understand the transition to more conspicuous displays of high status that occurred in societies of central Panama between 500 A.D. and 750 A.D. have considered a range of data representing economic, symbolic, demographic, and militaristic factors. The luxury items recovered from elite burials at Sitio Conte and El Hatillo and exchanged throughout the region at the time of contact constitute the best known material marking of social ranking from central

Panama (Oviedo 1944). The use of such items in expressing the importance of particular individuals and in elite trade offers an obvious basis for reconstructions of emergent social inequality and political authority. Indeed, considerable attention has been given to prestige items in discussions of social complexity in the region (Briggs 1989, 1993; Graham 1993; Helms 1979, 1992; Quilter and Hoopes, eds. 2003; Lange, ed. 1992; Snarskis 1987). Helms (1979), in particular, has proposed that central Panamanian chiefs gained authority by controlling networks of long distance exchange. Chiefs purportedly acquired luxury goods and attained esoteric knowledge through distant contacts; the former bearing symbolic importance, while the latter enabled chiefs to manipulate ideological systems (Drennan 1991, 1995; Helms 1979). Chiefs of greater importance emerged under such circumstances specifically because they enjoyed greater proximity and access to trade routes, thereby serving as important links to the goods and knowledge acquired from distant groups (Helms 1979). Helms (1979) points to such practices among the Kuna – an indigenous group in Panama who bolster social prestige by traveling to distant places to acquire knowledge – and notes Spanish accounts that describe the territory of Chief Parita as having been situated along an important long-distance trade route, by way of which Parita acquired support of lesser chiefs who cooperated for access to goods and knowledge.

A host of archaeologists working in the region have offered economic explanations, asserting that leadership in pre-Colombian Panama was acquired and maintained by controlling access to and exchange of local resources (Cooke 1984; Cooke and Ranere 1984, 1992; Cooke and Sánchez 1997, 2000; Hansell 1987, 1988; Linares 1977). Hansell (1987:128, 130, 1988:245), for instance, cites evidence from La Mula-Sarigua (ca. 200 B.C.) of specialized chipped-stone production that was organized on a large scale within workshops situated in proximity to a

sizeable chert outcrop. An abundance of complete polished and ground stone tools (e.g. celts, axes, manos, metates) was also observed at La Mula-Sarigua, absent any signs of local manufacture, leading Hansell (1987:130) to argue that specialized production and exchange of utilitarian goods promoted emerging differences in social status in the area. Similar evidence indicates that manufacture and macro-regional exchange of utilitarian goods, primarily stone axes and other woodworking implements, was well underway in and around central Panama by the middle of the first millennium A.D. (Cooke et al. 2003; Cooke and Sánchez 1997; 2000; Haller 2008). The production of jewelry and other prestige items has also been documented in the archaeological record of central Panama (Cooke et al. 2003; Isaza 2007; Mayo 2004). While such items were not produced with the same intensity as were utilitarian items, recent data nonetheless suggest a marked increase in the manufacture and standardization of shell jewelry and ceramics during the Cubitá phase (550 A.D. – 700; see Figure 1.2), alongside increased exchange and interaction (Haller 2008; Isaza 2007; Mayo 2004). Members of society that were able to maintain control over some facet of the production or distribution of craft items (utilitarian or prestige) had a basis from which to finance activities aimed at building social status and political authority (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; D’Altroy and Earle 1985). For example, ethnohistoric accounts link the political and military authority of the central Panamanian chief *Natá* directly to his control of coastal salt production, to the sizeable stores of resources within his compound, and to the role his village had as a central market (Espinosa 1994a, 1994b), providing an appropriate illustration of the sort of scenario that economic perspectives tend to see as central to social inequality in the region (Cooke and Ranere 1992; Linares 1977).

The notion that elites were able to acquire and sustain authority through control and management of subsistence resources represents something of a classic perspective in

anthropology and archaeology of complex societies (D'Altroy and Earle 1985; Fried 1967; Service 1962, 1975; Sahlins 1963, 1972; Steponaitis 1981, 1987; Webster 1992, 1997). In central Panama, the emergence of large sedentary villages in areas of high resource potential, such as La Mula-Sarigua (Hansell 1987, 1988), and impressive chiefly stores of subsistence goods documented ethnohistorically (Espinosa 1994a, 1994b; Oviedo 1944) lend credence to theories that social prestige was associated directly with the ability to acquire and control surpluses of subsistence goods (Haller 2008; see Cooke and Ranere 1992; Cooke and Sánchez 2004; Linares 1977). Such ideas are associated with theories that warfare, ensuing from social and ecological circumscription, created a basis for emerging leaders and institutionalized authority (Carneiro 1981; Redmond 1994). Once again, Panama's rich ethnohistoric record provides evidence for such a scenario (Oviedo 1944). Citing reports that land and territorial rights constituted the basis of endemic conflict among several paramount chiefs in the region, Linares (1977:73-74) posits that warfare enabled chiefs to acquire more territory, thereby increasing their prestige and power, and also supported a warrior class (*cabras*) that was rewarded with land and wealth items for hard-fought battles. Thus, conflict stemming from competition over subsistence resources has been suggested as a means of acquiring prestige and as a basis for social hierarchy.

### **1.1.3 Archaeological Research in the Río Parita Valley**

Archaeological models that identify economic forces as central to change focus on tracing patterns in the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and attempt to examine how these systems were managed to generate surpluses that could be mobilized to support chiefly authority (D'Altroy and Earle 1985; Earle 1997; Feinman 2004; Gilman 1995; Hayden and Cannon 1982; Johnson and Earle 1987 [2000]; McGuire 1992). The specific means by which



economic processes emerged vary across cases, but in each case the organization of production and exchange transcended strictly domestic contexts, creating a political economy in which economic behavior at the household level was significantly linked to larger political processes and institutions (Feinman 2004:2). It is productive, then, for archaeological investigation of political economies to focus on identifying the nature of the relationship between household behavior and the institutions that influenced the economy more broadly.

#### **1.1.3.1 Research Questions and Broader Goals of this Project**

The excavations reported on here produced evidence of the types of activities that were undertaken within households at El Hatillo, and provided a basis for addressing questions relating to the particular conditions and activities that set some households apart from others among their neighbors and kin within the village. How, for example, did individuals or groups in positions of authority persuade others to work toward the production of a surplus that would largely support social and political elites? Similarly, was production of particular goods centralized within a single location (e.g. single group of households), or dispersed among various settlements and households within a region? When and under what conditions did political economies emerge and how did these processes articulate with other processes aimed at supporting a social hierarchy?

#### **1.1.3.2 Recent Research in the Río Parita Valley and the Aims of Household Excavations**

Important data have been brought to bear on these questions by investigations carried out recently in the Río Parita Valley of central Panama, offering predominantly economic evidence of the emergence of chiefly authority in the area (Haller 2008; Haller and Menzies 2009). Regional-scale survey has revealed that populations in the Río Parita Valley were concentrated

primarily around productive arable soils and near estuarine and coastal resources during the earlier La Mula occupation (Figure 1.2). During the Tonosí phase population became dispersed and began to move inland; however, by the Cubitá phase (Figure 1.2) population concentration occurred again. Interestingly, El Hatillo, where the highest population densities during the Cubitá and subsequent Conte, Macaracas, and Parita (Figure 1.2) phases appear, is settled upon some of the least productive soils in the region (Haller 2008). Thus, a shift from more subsistence-oriented settlement patterns to patterns determined by more sociopolitical factors appears to have occurred at the beginning of the Cubitá phase, around 550 A.D. (Haller 2008:178). Populations that had been largely dispersed throughout the region during the La Mula and Tonosí phases – excluding the population at La Mula-Sarigua, which was relatively dense (see Hansell 1987, 1988) – became more clustered in and around inland sites (Haller 2008:178).

The results of regional survey, then, reveal more substantial occupation at El Hatillo than elsewhere in the Río Parita Valley beginning ca. 550 A.D. and peaking between 1100 A.D. and 1350 A.D., during the Parita phase (Figure 1.2). Major changes in the social order at El Hatillo, such as the construction of burial mounds, are apparent beginning in the Macaracas phase, but also reach their peak during the Parita phase (Haller 2008). It is especially interesting to note that shifts began during periods when one would expect to see changes in political dynamics and social organization in the region. That is, as Haller (2008) notes, if we want to understand the nature of emergent inequality in the region, then we should look to those phases just prior to the appearance of the most conspicuous markers of status.

Although El Hatillo does not occupy especially fertile land, which would have facilitated direct control of agricultural production by prehispanic chiefs, it was situated in a location with

access to a wide range of other subsistence resources (marine animals, salt, terrestrial game, etc.), and one that would have been central to regional exchange networks. Haller (2008) also notes a higher density of stone axes, both finished and pre-formed, at El Hatillo and suggests that the absence of such evidence at surrounding sites may be an indication that certain residents or groups at El Hatillo maintained a sort of indirect grasp on activities such as agriculture or the production of wooden tools and canoes in the region by controlling production and maintenance of the necessary tools (see Ames 1995; Cooke and Ranere 1984; Lass 1994; Welch 1996). Regional-scale research, however, is not particularly well-suited to investigating such patterns in finer detail. Following up on Haller's (2004) conclusions therefore requires a shift to finer scale analysis.

1821 A.D.	<b>COLONIAL</b> European contact and continued interaction with local indigenous populations.
1522 A.D.	<b>EL HATILLO</b> Population and the expression of status start to decline at He-4.
1300 A.D.	<b>PARITA</b> Mound burials, other markers of status, and population all reach their peak at He-4.
1100 A.D.	<b>MACARACAS</b> Elaborate burials and expression of status start to become more pronounced at He-4.
900 A.D.	<b>CONTE</b> Earliest evidence of elite areas at He-4 and first signs of possible controlled axe working.
700 A.D.	<b>CUBITA</b> Populations begin to concentrate at He-4
550 A.D.	<b>TONOSI</b> Coastal populations begin a shift to small inland settlements in riverine areas
250 A.D.	<b>LA MULA</b> Population settled primarily in small coastal villages; La Mula-Sarigua is the notable exception as a large and concentrated settlement.
200 B.C.	

**Figure 1.2. Annotated ceramic chronology for Central Panama (Cooke and Sánchez 2000; Haller 2008; Ladd 1964).**

Intermediate, or community-level, investigation was completed at El Hatillo by Menzies (2009) and currently is underway at secondary and tertiary sites in the Río Parita Valley settlement system (Haller 2006). This scale of analysis at El Hatillo sought to address specifically the role of craft production in the development of chiefly authority in the region (Menzies 2009). Intensive survey and surface collection at El Hatillo constituted the first phase of this investigation and provided spatial distributions of artifact densities across the site. The results of this survey established a basis for sampling strategies employed during Menzies' test excavations, which were subsequently used sixty 1 sq m excavation units to expose subsurface remains in selected areas across the site. Combining intensive systematic survey with more limited test excavation ensured large samples representative of a broad range of activities at El Hatillo. Artifact proportions calculated by type for each collection unit revealed variations in the distributions of remains across El Hatillo, and suggested differences in the organization and intensity of activities at the domestic level (Menzies 2009).

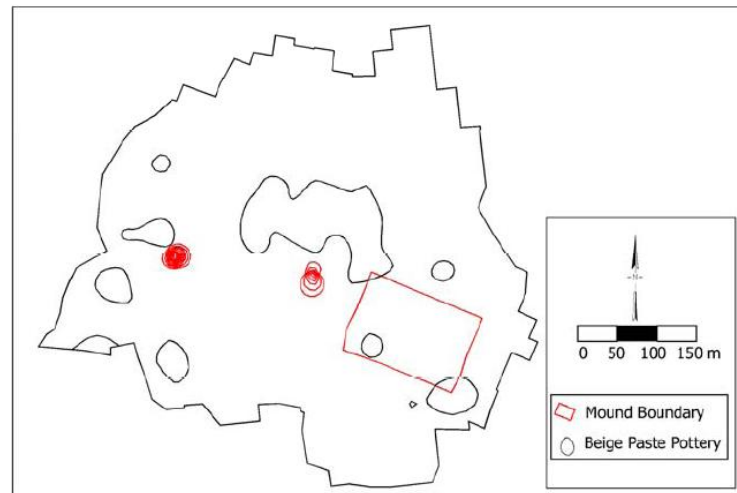
Data collected by Griggs (2005), Linares and Sheets (1980) and Ranere (1980) in the Cordillera and Atlantic watershed of Panama can be interpreted to show specialization in the production and maintenance of axes and attest to the economic importance of these activities throughout the region. Elsewhere, such observations have led to the ideas that control over axe manufacture, in light of the fundamentally important role of axes in woodworking and clearing agricultural fields, could have served as an effective, if indirect, means of controlling agriculture and subsistence production and the production of wooden tools and canoes (Lass 1994; Welch 1996; Townsend 1969). Haller (2008) has observed at the regional scale that the remains of axe working within the Río Parita Valley appear exclusively at El Hatillo. Analysis of Menzies' more intensive data from El Hatillo reveals possible zones of axe production for the Conte

through Parita phases (Figures 1.3a-c) with notably higher proportions of basalt flakes, possible axe preforms, and finished axes than elsewhere on the site.

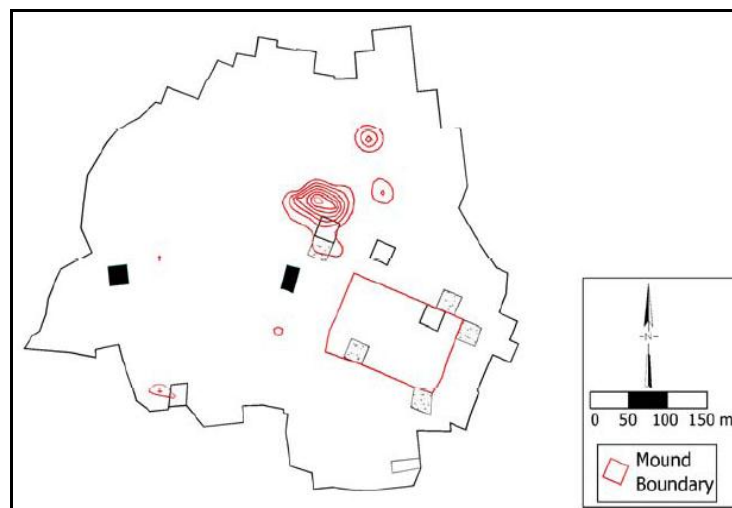
Two of the three axe manufacturing zones identified at El Hatillo correspond spatially with a concentration of Conte beige ceramics (Figure 1.3), a ceramic variety acquired from regions over sixty kilometers away. The restricted distribution of these ceramics at El Hatillo contrasts with locally produced and contemporaneous Conte red ceramics, which are quite common and widespread across the site (Ladd 1962; Menzies 2009b; 2008). Conte phase residents of El Hatillo who possessed beige ceramics clearly enjoyed access to non-local goods and lived in households grouped together within the village, representing a sort of elite zone of El Hatillo. A similar pattern is apparent for later Macaracas phase deposits, in which higher proportions of *botellas* and pedestal plates, as opposed to more utilitarian vessels, are concentrated in a specific area of El Hatillo (Figure 1.4) also suggesting a zone of elite occupation. A single axe working area corresponds spatially with this Macaracas elite zone (Figure 1.4). This pattern is repeated in Parita phase deposits that contain effigy vessels and pedestal plates in higher concentrations than ordinary vessel types (Figure 1.5). Similar to patterns for deposits from earlier phases, this possible Parita phase elite zone surrounds a concentration of axe working remains.

As previously noted, major changes in the region began during the Cubitá phase, (see Figure 1.2) when populations moved to inland sites, particularly El Hatillo, which maintained a higher population than elsewhere in the Río Parita Valley throughout the subsequent Conte, Macaracas, and Parita phases. The nature of ‘eliteness’ at El Hatillo took on increasingly pronounced characteristics during these phases, as individuals of high status began to express their social standing in ways that suggested a more formal hierarchy. The earliest elaborate burials at El

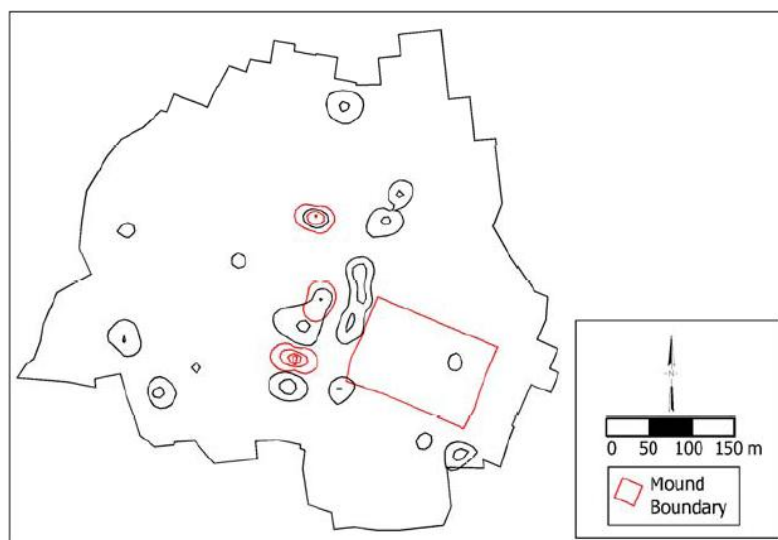
Hatillo, for status (Dade 1972; Haller 2008; Ladd 1962). The spatial correspondence between axe working remains and areas of probable elite occupation apparent in Menzies' (2008) results suggest that control of this craft may well have been important to elite position at El Hatillo.



**Figure 1.3. Contour map showing areas of El Hatillo (He-4) with the highest densities of axes (red contour lines) and the highest densities of non-local Conte beige ceramics (black contour lines) based on results of community scale investigation. From Menzies (2009).**



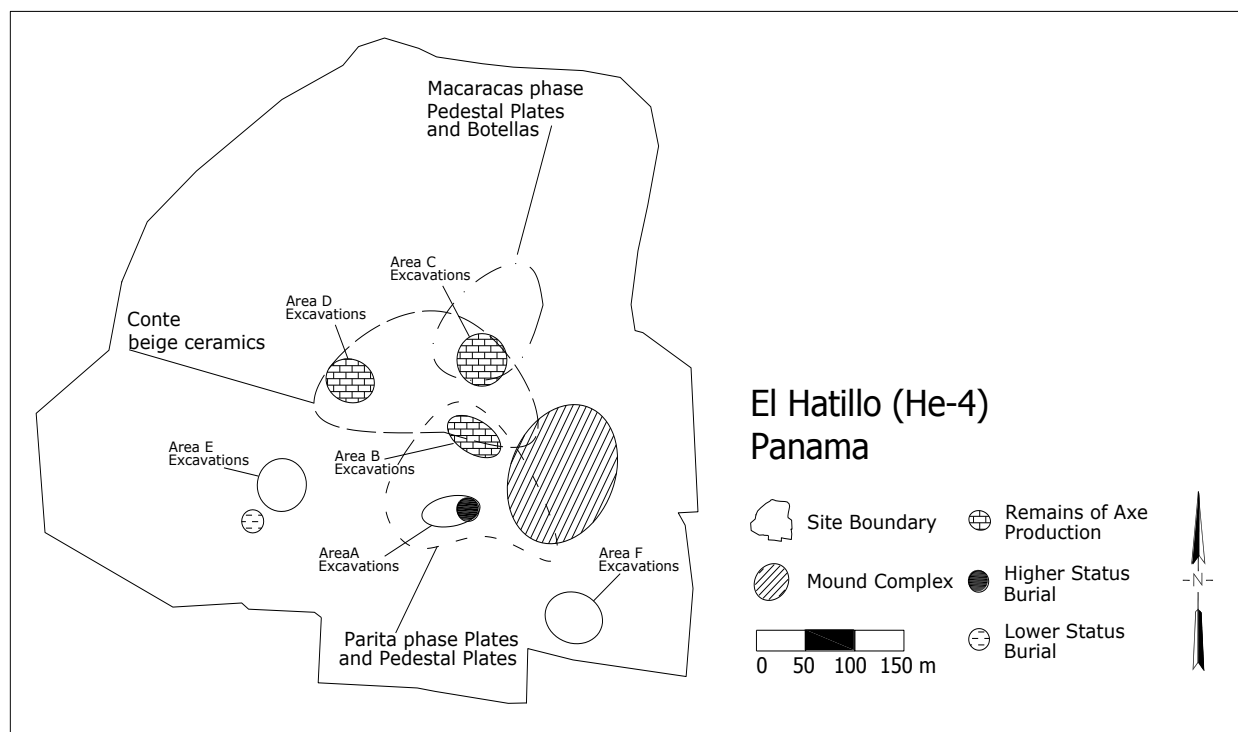
**Figure 1.4. Contour map showing areas of El Hatillo (He-4) with the highest densities of Macaracas polychrome pedestal plates (red contour lines), and test units with axes and axe flakes (black squares), and units with axes only (gray squares) based on community level investigation. From Menzies (2009).**



**Figure 1.5. Contour map showing areas of El Hatillo (He-4) with the highest densities of Parita polychrome pedestal plates (black contour lines) and trapezoidal axes (red contour lines) based on community level investigation. From Menzies (2009).**

If the production of axes was centrally organized early on at El Hatillo, during the Cubitá or Conte phases when settlement nucleation occurred, then it is likely that this activity influenced the development of social inequality in fundamental ways. That is, elite residents at El Hatillo may initially have gained authority over others in the community by first controlling production of axes indicating that more direct economic control and coercive power were at play. A somewhat different scenario would be implied if centrally organized axe working began during the later Macaracas phase, when expressions of status first became pronounced. This would suggest that the elite of El Hatillo sought to further their hold on status by acquiring control over the manufacture of axes. The situation would be different still if axe production first became a specialized task during the following Parita phase, when elaborate burials and both regional and local populations peaked. An onset of axe production during the Parita phase would, of course, imply that this activity had little influence over establishing or advancing authority, but was

probably an effective means of maintaining a recognized social hierarchy. Finally, if axe manufacture was not, in fact, associated with elite areas at all, then we might conclude that the production of axes at El Hatillo was not a force behind the emergence or maintenance of social



**Figure 1.6. Schematic drawing showing areas of higher status remains for the Conte, Macaracas, and Parita phases with corresponding areas of possible axe production, and the locations household level excavations.**

authority at the site. The results of horizontal excavations in four specific areas of El Hatillo where both axe-making debris and elite artifacts are known to concentrate (Figure 1.6) provide the necessary chronological and contextual information to answer these questions.

Understanding how axe manufacture was organized is also important to evaluating its broader social role. The concentration of axe-making debris in a few restricted areas is certainly indicative of specialization, but it reveals little about the scale or intensity of production or about



who actually undertook axe production. If, for example, control of craft production had much importance to elites, then it might be expected to have occurred at relatively large scale and high intensity (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Costin 1991). Since large scale and high intensity are virtually impossible to define in absolute terms, we need to look for changes in scale or intensity that correspond with the social changes in which craft production has been hypothesized to play an important role. Determining whether axe production was carried out by members of elite households themselves or in adjacent commoner households (or possibly even in non-residential workshops) is also of interest to questions regarding its broader social role. Changes in scale and intensity of axe production would be indicated by changes in the gross amounts of axe-making debris and in the proportion of total cultural remains it accounted for. Substantial amounts of axe-making debris in clear contextual association with elite artifactual and architectural remains would locate axe production within elite households. Contextual association with commoner household debris, but in what are identified generally as elite areas of the settlement, would suggest attached specialists of some sort (Brumfiel and Earle 1987:5).

Investigations of deposits of interest at El Hatillo would not have proven useful, however, if broader stratigraphic excavations were not also carried out within seemingly non-descript areas of the site. It could not, for example, be presumed that suspected elite zones were, in fact, substantially different from other domestic areas without identifying characteristics of the latter. Some sort of baseline data was essential, then, to establishing a basis of comparison with data obtained from excavation of the areas discussed above. Larger scale excavations of two more 'ordinary' areas of El Hatillo (Figure 1.6) were carried out to provide this baseline data. This provided a clear sense of the sorts of activities that took place across all households in the village, the types of goods that were consumed across all households, and a basis for comparison

of the rates at which various goods (e.g., utilitarian and non-utilitarian ceramics, lithics, different animals, etc.) were consumed across households. It was noted, for examples, that most households produced their own chipped-stone tools, prepared and consumed a diet that consisted minimally of animal protein and, presumably, mostly of agriculturally produced foodstuffs (i.e., maize, manioc, etc.), and constructed dwellings of mostly the same size and arrangement.

## **1.2 SUMMARY OF FIELD METHODS**

Household level excavations sought to produce information about elite and non-elite domestic activities at El Hatillo in order to answer questions about the nature of status differences and the causes and conditions of the initial emergence of social hierarchies in the region. Six areas of the site were chosen for excavation aimed specifically toward exposing activity areas, structural features, and refuse associated with domestic contexts. One hundred square meters of excavation across all six areas encountered a total ten middens, each sampled with individual 1m x 1m units, and segments of at least six structures.

Excavations in Area A (Figure 1.6) opened 15 sq m of intact deposits. Architectural features and mortuary remains recorded by Menzies (2009) in this area, and artifact collections made there during his intensive survey of the site, produced evidence of higher status occupants dating mostly to the Parita phase. The broader excavations undertaken at the household level were aimed at generating more detail of this later elite domestic context, including information on dwelling and storage units, refuse dumps, activity areas, etc. Since evidence of axe production was also previously recorded in this area (Menzies 2009), the potential was recognized for these excavations to reveal details of late phase contexts of craft production at El Hatillo. Area A

excavations did produce evidence of domestic activities and confirmed prior indications of the existence of higher status occupation in the area during the Parita phase (i.e. comparatively higher proportions of elaborate ceramics and faunal remains).

Surface collection and testing (Menzies 2009) had revealed especially high densities of axe production remains in the second area of El Hatillo chosen for localized excavations (Area B, Figure 1.6). No features were encountered in this area previously, but lithic material indicated that it had likely been the locus of axe production in prehistory. Broader excavation proceeded by opening 1m x 1m test units in areas of higher relative artifact densities. Nearby looter's pits were also cleaned in an effort to expose evidence of subsurface features. However, expectations of intact features associated with craft production diminished after 5 sq m of excavation exposed mostly disturbed deposits. Restrictions on areas open to excavation placed on the project by the private owner of the fields containing Excavation Areas B, C, and D prevented more extensive testing of the area, and contributed to a decision to abandon further excavation of Area B.

Placement of the next set of excavations in Area C (Figure 1.6) followed from data collected by Haller (2008) that showed evidence of both Conte and Macaracas phase occupations, and data from Menzies' surface collection that revealed higher proportions of decorated Macaracas phase ceramics and specialized vessel forms that pointed to higher status occupants. Higher proportions of axe production remains were recovered by both Haller and Menzies from fields in and around Area C, suggesting yet another possibility of encountering a context of axe production. One sq m units in Area C were located on visible surface features indicative of refuse deposits to recover one sort of domestic data, while test units of varying sizes were opened nearby to expose associated features. A total of 28 sq m was excavated in Area C, producing samples from five separate middens and exposing segments of at least two distinct

structures. Artifacts collected from these excavations revealed that prehispanic occupations extended from Conte through Parita phases and included slightly higher proportions of decorated ceramics among Conte and Macaracas remains in particular.

Area D (Figure 1.6) was determined by prior research to bear higher densities of earlier ceramics, including non-local Conte beige (Haller 2008; Menzies 2009b). This finding raised expectations that further excavation would encounter evidence of early elite households, which could produce data helpful in determining whether or not early elites were associated with any sort of specialized craft production. Twenty-one square meters of excavation revealed evidence of Conte and Parita phase occupations in Area D, and, as shown in subsequent chapters, supported prior notions of high status households during the earlier Conte phase occupation.

Areas E and F were selected for excavation in order to produce evidence of more ordinary occupations at El Hatillo that could serve as comparative a baseline. Collections made by both Haller and Menzies in these areas of the site located only ‘ordinary’ remains in ‘ordinary’ densities. No evidence of specialized activities (i.e. organized craft production, ceremonial feasting, etc.) or elite status (i.e. high proportions of decorated ceramics and faunal material, etc.) was recovered during either regional survey or intensive surface collection in either Area E or F at El Hatillo. Further, a tomb excavated by Menzies in proximity to Area E was found to contain bundle burials that lacked any grave goods and was generally indicative of a relatively low status interment. Area E excavations, which amounted to 16 sq m, produced later Parita phase remains from a midden and structural features, and provided excellent data for comparison to similar deposits in Areas A, C, and D. Area F excavations totaled 15 sq m and met with somewhat unexpected results. Evidence of especially early (Cubita and Conte phase) and especially late (El Hatillo phase) occupations at El Hatillo came from two refuse deposits and

early structural remains. In the case of El Hatillo phase remains, refuse from an evidently ceremonial context (i.e. feasting) provided an interesting ‘snapshot’ of late-stage occupation of this part of the site.

Once areas were chosen for excavation based on prior survey and testing, excavation proceeded in one of two ways. In cases where previous features (i.e. burials, post holes) had been identified, units were placed to extend these features (as in Area A); in places without previously exposed remains, surface features highly suggestive of refuse deposits (i.e. artifact concentrations, low rises) were sampled (as in Areas B-F). In the latter cases, once intact midden deposits were located in a given area, test units of varying size were opened to locate associated features. This approach proved effective in all but one of these cases (Area B), and provided a wealth of domestic data, mainly in the form of structural remains and refuse. Entire structures were not excavated since it was recognized that segments of structures are sufficient to adequately reconstruct the rough dimensions of prehistoric households (Killion 1992; Santley 1993:74). In most areas, excavations exposed enough remains to determine relative size and dimension of structures, and in several areas evidence was recorded of multiple structures.

All fill removed from excavation units was screened in the field using 6mm mesh screen. To ensure that small faunal remains, including fish bone, were represented in the collections, a two-liter soil sample was taken from each 10cm level of each square meter of excavation and wet-screened through 3mm and 1mm stacked mesh in the laboratory. Similarly, two one-liter soil samples were collected from each square meter of features known to represent prehistoric activity surfaces and wet-screened through 3mm and 1mm stacked mesh. This ensured that any microartifactual evidence present in the remains would be represented in the collections, since such data provide reliable indicators of the types and intensities of activities carried out within a

given space (Hodder and Cessford 2004; Moholy-Nagy 1990). Finally, flotation samples were taken from apparent cooking remains and examined in the laboratory to identify possible microbotanical evidence.

Processing and analysis of collections began during the course of the field season, as remains were collected, and continued for 9 weeks following excavation. Ceramic analysis was based on regional chronologies (Cooke and Sánchez 2000; Ladd 1964; Sánchez 1995) to identify age of deposits, and recorded vessel form, design, and decoration using both regionally specific (Cooke and Sánchez 2000; Isaza 2007; Ladd 1964; Sánchez 1995) and general resources (Rice 1987). Preliminary analysis of faunal remains was carried out by Richard Cooke, and identified to genus 20% of all bones collected. Lithic artifacts were compared to established local chronologies and analysis recorded raw material, reduction strategy, and use wear (Cooke and Ranere 1984, 1992; Ranere 1975, 1980). Attention was also given to identifying tools devoted to specialized craft production (i.e. woodworking, shell production), to account for evidence of the intensity and organization of such activities at El Hatillo (see Feinman 1999). Finally, human remains were analyzed only to determine relative age of the individual and are available for further future analysis (DeYoung 2008).

## **2.0 AREA A EXCAVATIONS: HIGH STATUS HOUSEHOLDS AND THE NATURE OF SOCIAL AUTHORITY DURING THE PEAK POLITICAL PERIOD**

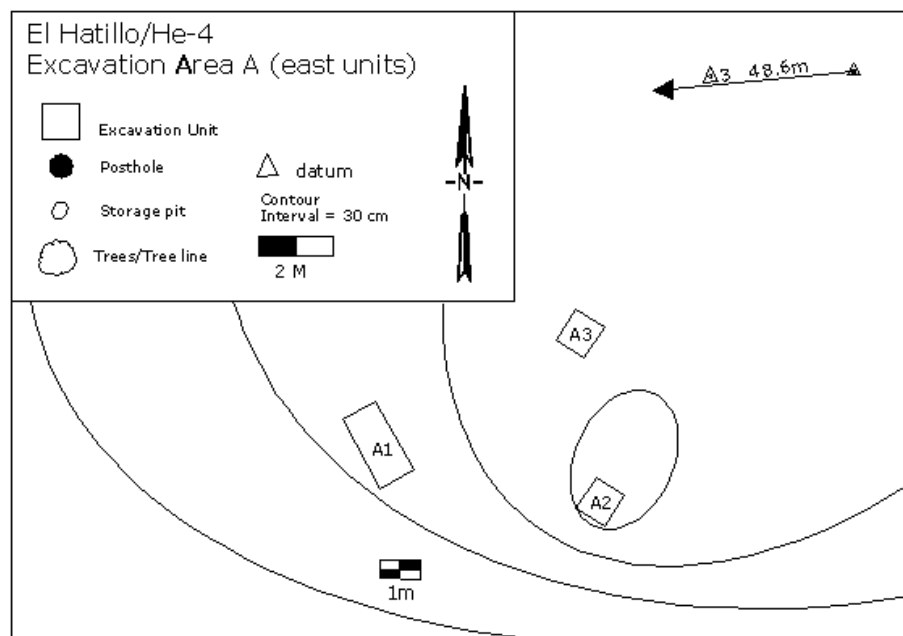
Remains from surface collections and test excavations conducted by Menzies (2009) in the area of El Hatillo that would become Area A during household excavation (Figures 2.1) provided evidence of domestic occupation, high status mortuary activity, and craft production from the Parita phase. Higher quantities of axe remains and the remains of craft production (i.e. polishing stones, pre-forms) were noted in surface collections, while test excavations produced structural remains and an unassociated burial; the latter suggested a higher status individual from the Parita phase. These results established expectations that further excavation of this area of El Hatillo would reveal high status activities, both domestic and non-domestic, of later phase occupants. Further, by comparison to other areas of El Hatillo, Field 26 was less disturbed, having been spared the severe looting that has affected other parts of the site. This area was selected for further horizontal excavation and designated Area A.

Two sets of excavations, approximately 40 m apart, were undertaken in Area A – one consisting of two 1 sq m units and a single 3 m x 1 m unit, and a second set of excavations totaling 12 sq m in area and consisting of 11 sq m of continuous excavations, and a single separate 1 sq m unit placed in an apparent midden. The first set of excavations sought to expose features associated with the mortuary remains revealed during test excavations (Menzies 2009). A 3 m x 1 m trench (Unit A1) was excavated adjacent to (50 cm east) Menzies' test excavation,

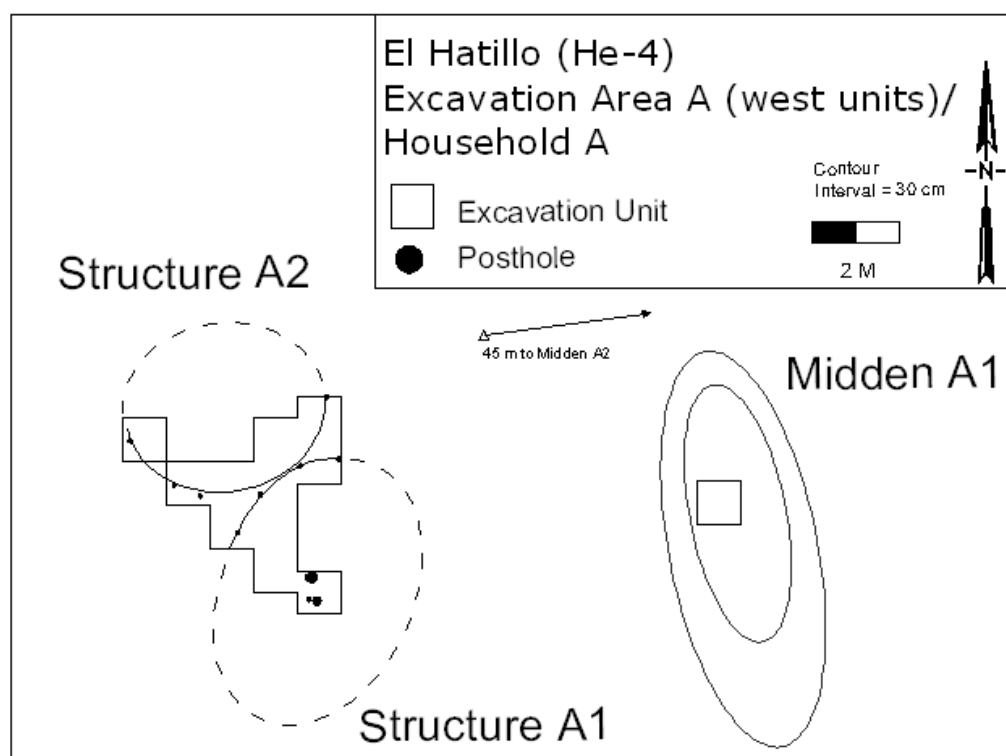
which yielded the Parita phase tomb, and two separate 1 sq m units were excavated 4.5 m east (Unit A2) and 2.2 m north (Unit A3) of Unit A1, atop a conspicuous natural rise adjacent to the tomb. Area A1 lay in close proximity to the central mounds of El Hatillo (75 m southwest), which contained elaborate tombs of presumably important residents with higher social status (Bull 1965; Ladd 1964; Sterling and Willey 1950). The proximity of Area A1 to the central mortuary monuments of the site suggest a higher status residential area might be encountered. Units A1 – A3 yielded dense midden deposits containing very high quantities of finely decorated ceramics compared to other areas of the site, most likely suggesting feasting associated with funerary rituals occurred in this part of the site.

The second set of excavation units (Figure 2.2), ~ 50 m west of Units A1 – A3, sought to extend excavations around evidence of structural remains encountered by testing in this part of El Hatillo (Menzies' 2006). Unit A4 was a single 1 sq m unit, 46 m west of Units A1 – A3, placed on a low rise that was indicative of a midden. A second area – Unit A5 – totaling 10 sq m of continuous excavation was opened 11 m west of Unit A4 and produced additional evidence of structural remains. Finally, a single 1 sq m unit labeled A6 was excavated off of the northwestern corner of Unit A5 to examine stratigraphy presumed to represent deposits external to structural remains located in A5.





**Figure 2.1.** Plan view of Area A excavations showing Units A1 – A3, which sampled Midden A2, and were 45 m east-northeast of the of Midden A1 and structural remains.



**Figure 2.2.** Plan view of Area A excavations showing Units A4 – A6, which sampled Midden A1 and associated structural remains, and were located 45 m west-southwest of Units A1-A3 (Midden A2).

## **2.1 STRATIGRAPHY**

The deposits encountered in each set of excavations in Area A were stratigraphically equivalent, so the activities that produced each appear to have occurred around the same time. Five main strata, labeled Zones 1 – 11 (Z1 – Z11) were identified in Area A, and sub-strata were identified in three of these – Z3, Z6, and Z9. Excavations produced remains dating from the Cubita through El Hatillo phases, with the majority of the remains deposited during the Parita phase, when the construction of elaborate tombs in the village's formal cemetery was fully underway and population peaked at El Hatillo (see Haller 2008). Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings, can be found in the online database that accompanies this written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

## **2.2 DISCUSSION**

### **2.2.1 Overview of Remains from Area A**

Evidence of higher status residents and the occurrence of high status burial treatment in and around Area A (Menzies 2009), suggested that household excavations in this part of the site would produce the remains of elite occupation from later, particularly Parita phase occupation. These expectations were met, as Parita phase artifacts constituted the large majority of remains within the midden deposits sampled in Area A (labeled Middens A1 and A2). Household level

excavations in Area A also provided evidence of earlier, Cubitá and Conte phase, occupations in this part of the site, and suggested that the activities that produced the later deposits actually began in the late Macaracas, following a possible break in occupation, and extended through the Parita phase.

Remains in Area A suggested that occupation began in this part of El Hatillo with a modest number of villagers who appear to have engaged in mostly ordinary domestic activities during the Cubita phase. There appears to have been a break in occupation spanning much of the Macaracas phase, but deposits that overlay early remains demonstrate re-occupation of this part of the village. There was also a marked shift, beginning during the late Macaracas phase, from strictly domestic activities in Area A toward more communal activities, like feasting. Macaracas and Parita phase deposits in Units A1 – A3 (Z6A and Z7) attest to such activities and are proximate (< 50 m) to the formal cemetery at El Hatillo, raising the likelihood that these activities occurred in association with elaborate funerals or other ceremonies honoring the deceased occupants of the village's burial mounds. The very dense accumulation of faunal remains encountered in midden deposits in Unit A4 (i.e., Zone 8, or Midden A1) compared to all other middens at El Hatillo, was roughly contemporaneous with deposits from communal activities in deposits of Units A1 – A3 (i.e., Z6A and Z6B, or Midden A2). These deposits, although spatially separate, were strongly indicative of the fact that communal events, such as feasting, mortuary rituals, ancestral observances, etc., played a very important role in the society during later occupational phases, and that elite households (like Household A, see below) probably sponsored these events.

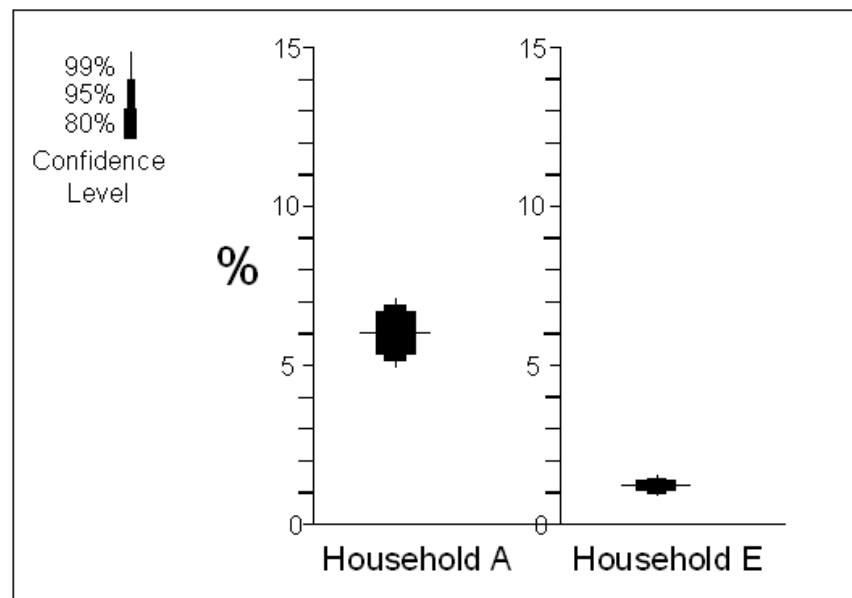
Portions of two structures – Structures A1 and A2 – were excavated in Unit A5 and dated to the Parita phase, making them contemporaneous with the communal activities. These

structures were spatially and temporally (i.e., stratigraphically) associated with the remains from Midden A1, which was taken to be representative of the household activities and, along with the structural remains, constituted Household A. Size, layout, and artifact assemblages from Household A indicate that its members participated in mostly ordinary domestic activities, with the clear exception of food preparation. The proximity of Household A to Midden A2, and stratigraphic evidence that places deposits from these contexts in close temporal association with one another (particularly Z10, see online dataset for detailed description), indicate that Household A was responsible for the preparation of food consumed during the communal events that produced Midden A2. That is, the contents of Midden A1, which lay in close proximity to (~ 7 m) and was contemporaneous with Structure A1, suggested that the residents of Household A obtained and prepared large quantities and varieties of animal meat that was apparently for consumption by more than just the members of a single household. Midden A2, which lay 45 m east of Midden A1 and Structures A1 and A2, is highly characteristic of feasting remains (large, deliberately broken sherds from high quality and elaborately decorated vessels that appear in very large proportions), and provides evidence of a likely space and social scenario for the consumption of food prepared by Household A. This scenario is explained in further detail below with specific reference to Area A artifact assemblages.

### **2.2.2 Reconstructing Social Activities in Area A**

Closer scrutiny of the patterns that have emerged from the remains in Middens A1 and A2 makes the nature of the events that produced these deposits much more apparent. In general, Midden A1 ceramics were characterized by a higher proportion of polychrome sherds ( $.06 \pm .007$ , CL = 95%) as compared to Parita remains in middens from other areas, particularly Area E

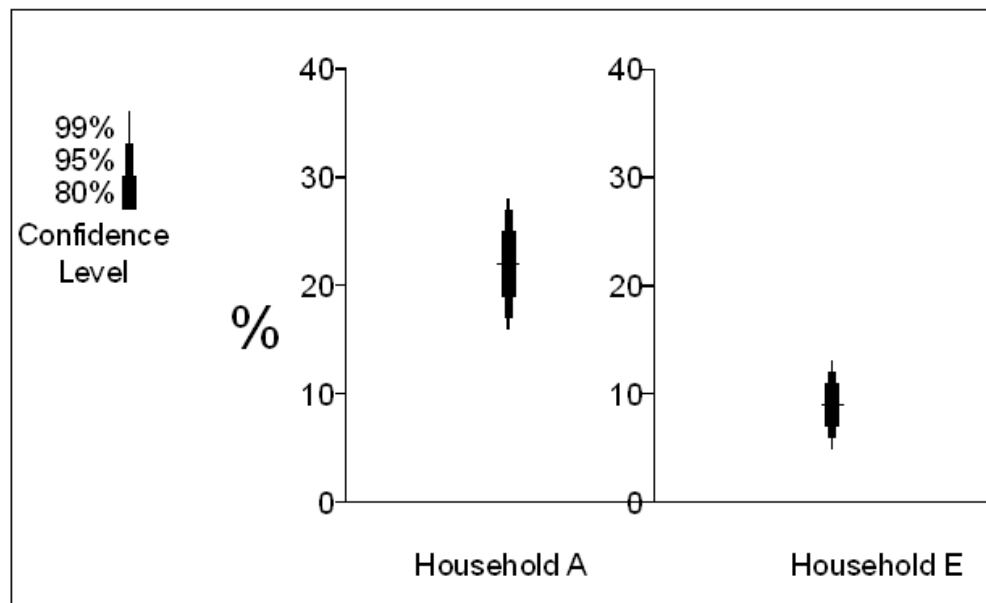
(see Chapter 6), and roughly equivalent proportions of cooking/storage vessels ( $.46 \pm .055$ , CL = 95%) and serving vessels ( $.48 \pm .056$ , CL = 95%) (Figure 2.3). Closer inspection of the contents revealed that a very highly significant and sizeable proportion of pedestal vessels ( $.15 \pm .04$ , CL = 95%) contributed to the overall number of serving vessels in the assemblage from Midden A1, while a higher proportion of jars ( $.14 \pm .05$ , CL = 95%) than would be expected of a domestic context was noted among the cooking/storage vessels (Figure 2.4).



**Figure 2.3. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of decorated sherds to total sherds for Parita phase households.**

Finally, as noted earlier, higher proportion of ceramics (.10) recovered from Midden A1 had moderate to heavy evidence of exposure to fire (i.e. charring) compared to remains from other such deposits. Not only were charred remains less frequent in other middens, but when they did appear, they were localized within the deposits as though they represented single events (e.g., dumping of ashes from cooking hearths, etc.). Remains in Midden A1, on the other hand,

contained dense deposits of faunal material and charred sherds (the latter indicative of cooking and not post-depositional exposure to fire – i.e., sherds not charred on profiles, but on surfaces), which accumulated more or less continuously throughout the Parita phase and suggested food preparation undertaken on a larger-scale (i.e., for more than just household consumption) occurred with some frequency among the Parita phase residents of Household A.



**Figure 2.4. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of elaborate vessel types to total sherds for Parita phase households.**

Lithics were scarce among the remains from Midden A1. Only three non-utilized flakes and two *mano* fragments were collected from among the refuse. This, of course, suggested that small-scale production of lithic tools occurred within Parita phase households, with manufacture undertaken only to meet the demands of domestic tasks.

While ceramics and lithics in Midden A1 appeared in overall proportions that were similar to the proportions of these artifacts in other such contexts across El Hatillo, the

proportion of faunal remains to total number of sherds excavated in Midden A1 (.37) far surpassed that of any other context encountered during household excavation at El Hatillo (indeed, it was fully two orders of magnitude greater than contemporaneous deposits from Area E; see below). Among the 1763 animal remains, 613 were identified to genus, including 349 deer, 258 fish, three shark, one toad, one crocodile, and one sea turtle. An additional 16 specimens were identified more generally, including 13 iguanid specimens, two opossum, and one armadillo. Finally, 913 mammal specimens, six bird specimens, and 216 specimens that could only be identified as vertebrates completed the assemblage. When compared to the proportions of faunal remains from other domestic contexts reported from household excavations at El Hatillo, it is apparent that the Parita phase residents of Household A engaged in the preparation of greater varieties and proportions of animal meat than any other domestic context. The proportion of faunal remains in Midden A1, even accounting for a roughly 200 year period of accumulation, clearly suggests preparation of food for more than simply household consumption, and most likely for a communal feast.

Features that constituted Structures A1 and A2 were excavated approximately 7 m west of Midden A1. Structure A1 had a familiar pattern of construction noted in buildings from Areas C and D (see Chapters 4 and 5), with a round to slightly oblong shape and overall area of about 20 – 30 sq m. The remains of Structure A2, which lay immediately adjacent (< 1 m away) to those of Structure A1, were not sufficient to identify details of overall shape or size, but were determined to represent a separate structure that probably formed part of Household A (as opposed to maintenance or reconstruction of Structure A1).

Forty-five meters east of the Household A features, Units A1 – A3 were opened near a test unit that produced a higher status Parita phase tomb during community level investigation

(Menzies 2009). Household excavations in this part of Area A were situated immediately adjacent to the Parita burial, between Household A (45 m west) and one edge of the village's formal cemetery (~ 45 m northeast). These excavations encountered dense refuse deposits (Z6A and Z7, see above) labeled Midden A2 (Figure 2.5). The remains from Midden A2 dated mainly to the Parita phase, except for the lowest deposits, which were generally less dense and contained mostly Macaracas phase wares. The refuse from this midden was different from other such deposits excavated at the site for several immediately obvious reasons. First, on average, the ceramic sherds were much larger than sherds from other middens, often representing 10% - 25%, or more, of a vessel, and generally showed less wear (i.e., paint was less worn, rim sherds revealed less rim-wear, etc.). This suggests that these vessels were being used briefly, perhaps for a single occasion, and being discarded. Higher proportions of such sherds concentrated within middens is frequently taken as an indication of deliberate destruction of ceramics – an act reported ethnographically and archaeologically for feasts (Bataille 1985; Dietler 1996; Dietler and Hayden 2001). Second, there was a visibly higher quantity of elaborately decorated sherds in this context; a pattern noted in analysis, which revealed that polychrome ceramics made up a much higher proportion ( $.10 \pm .008$ , CL = 95%) of the total assemblage from this context than was observed in any other context excavated at the household level (Figure 2.6). This is also a characteristic of contexts in which larger-than-domestic, or communal, consumption of food and beverage occurred (Rosenswig 2007). Thus, Midden A2 can be characterized as a refuse deposit that did not accumulate from ordinary domestic activity (such as middens reported for Area E, see Chapter 6), but rather from activity that probably involved multiple participants from multiple households. It seems unlikely that members of a single household would engage in the



consumption of such apparently large quantities of food, particularly animal protein, and fancy ceramics.

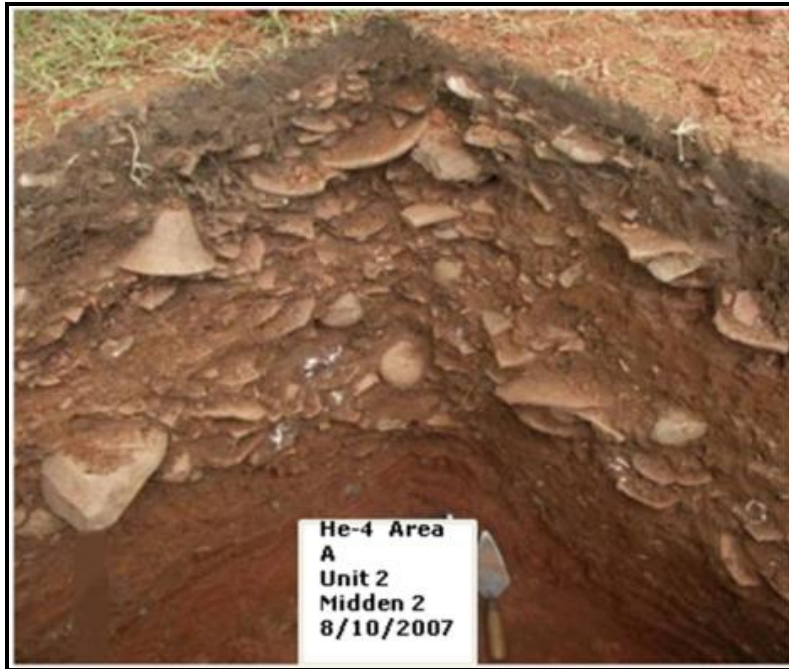


Figure 2.5. Photo of Midden A2.

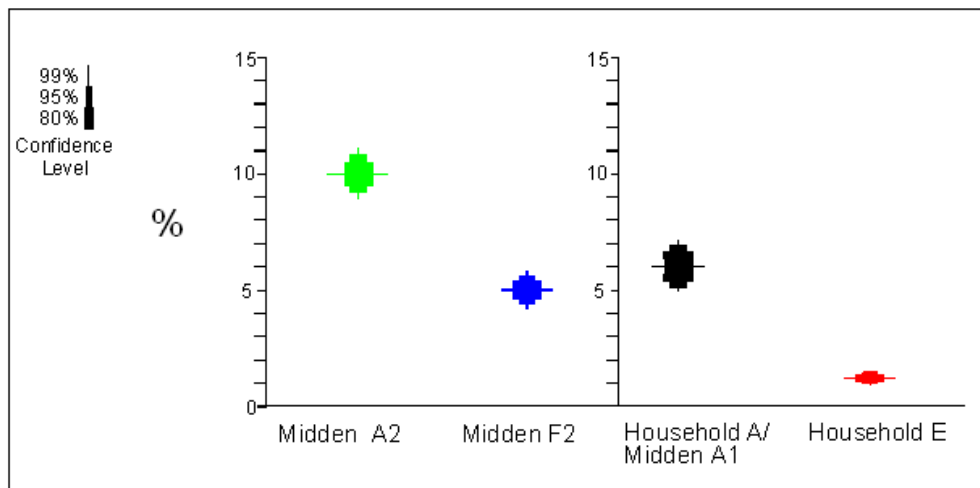
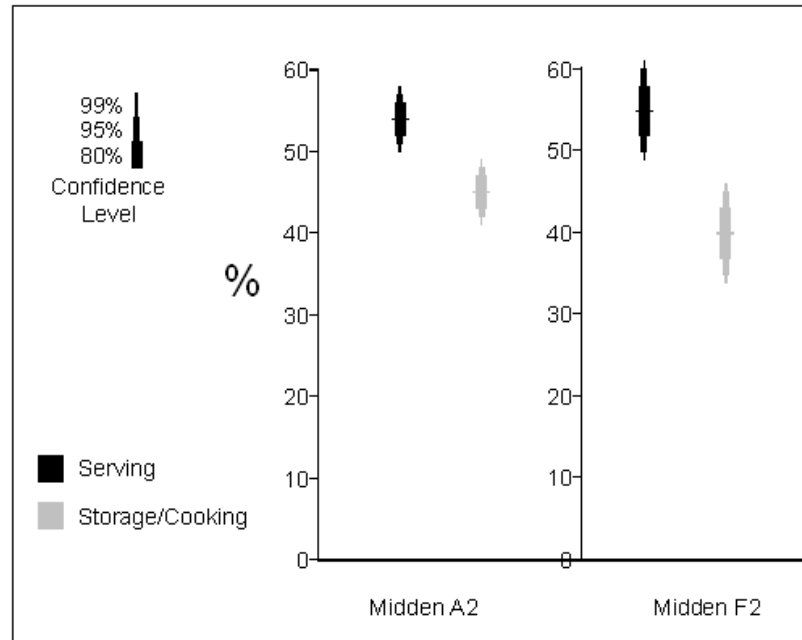


Figure 2.6. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing the proportions of decorated sherds to total sherds for all Parita and El Hatillo phase contexts.

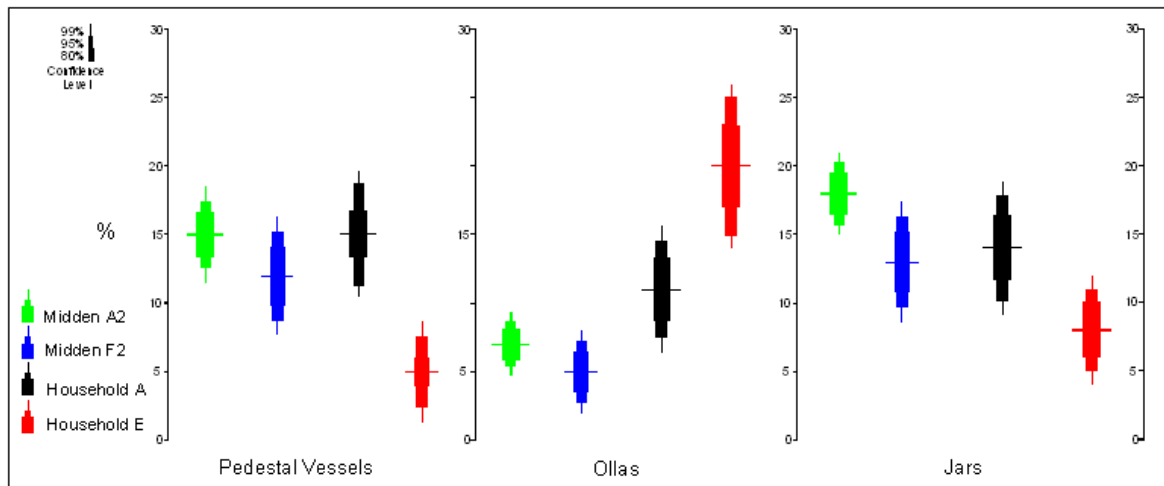
The roughly equivalent proportions of serving vessels ( $.54 \pm .03$ , CL = 95%) and cooking/storage vessels ( $.45 \pm .03$ , CL = 95%) for Midden A2 was surprising given the high proportion of decorated wares, which are typically not associated with cooking (Rice 1987) (Figure 2.7). Looking more closely at the proportions of specific vessel types within these broader categories, however, offers a better perspective on the nature of the composition of Midden A2. First, among serving vessels, pedestal plates contribute a proportion ( $.15 \pm .02$ , CL = 95%) consistent with those of Household A (Figure 2.8). Second, among cooking/storage vessels, *ollas* – the most ubiquitous of cooking vessels throughout all occupational phases at El Hatillo – are poorly represented ( $.07 \pm .015$ , CL = 95%), while jars – presumably used to store, and perhaps serve, liquids contribute a higher proportion ( $.18 \pm .02$ , CL = 95%) to this assemblage than that of any other context excavated at El Hatillo (Figure 2.8). The former suggests consumption and preparation of food were activities carried out in a spatially distinct area because cooking vessels were notably few in Midden A2, which would not be expected of a context in which cooking, particularly for presumably large groups, took place, while serving vessels in Midden A2 were typically fancy polychromes and generally appeared in higher proportions in this context than in any other excavated at the household level at El Hatillo. The latter of these patterns indicates greater consumption of liquids because jars are typically used for storage and serving of liquids (Rice 1987). Since most of the jars from Midden A2 were fancy polychromes, we might conclude that they were serving, rather than storage vessels. Finally, the distribution of *tecomates* – the most common vessel form during the Partia phase at El Hatillo (see also Ladd 1964 for discussion of commonality of this vessel form at El Hatillo; note, Ladd 1964 does not use the term *tecomate*), and one apparently well-suited to cooking and transport of food due to a restrictive opening and dual handles (Figure 2.9; see Rice 1987 regarding

functional qualities mentioned and their associations with cooking and transport of food) - was more varied in Midden A2 than in any other context at El Hatillo. Specifically, rim diameters for *tecomates* from all contexts outside of Midden A2 show little or no variation, while *tecomates* within the diagnostic assemblage from Midden A2 show a bi-modal distribution. Specifically, a stem-and-leaf plot reveals that *tecomates* from Midden A2 tended to be of two sizes, with groups clustering around 13 cm ( $\pm .58$  cm, CL = 95%) and 20 cm ( $\pm .81$  cm, CL = 95%) diameters, a difference shown to be very highly significant (Figures 2.8a and 2.8b). Such a pattern might be expected from an assemblage that reflects communal participation if we consider that ordinary domestic contexts at El Hatillo contained multiple *tecomates* of one general size with openings measuring around 13 cm. One might imagine that such an assemblage reflects a domestic pattern in which each member of a household had a *tecomate* for individual consumption of food. In Midden A2, this smaller group exists, but it is joined by a second group of larger *tecomates* whose openings measured around 20 cm, roughly 50% larger than the other, more common variety. It has been reported archaeologically and ethnographically that elites who sponsor feasts possess larger sizes of particular vessels (Adams 2004; DeBoer 2003; Rosenswig 2007).

In general, lithics were more frequent in Midden A2 than most other contexts excavated during household excavation, but were still scarce, with a ratio to overall sherds of only .003. However, lithics from this context tended to be of higher quality material and were more skillfully produced than the expedient lithics typical of most contexts. Faunal remains were quite



**Figure 2.7. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of Serving vessels and Storage/Cooking vessels within the overall ceramic assemblage for Midden A2 and Midden F2.**



**Figure 2.8. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of pedestal vessels, ollas, and jars for all Parita and El Hatillo phase contexts.**

common in Midden A2, with a ratio to overall sherds of .10, but were still considerably less dense than in Midden A1 from Household A. Finally, exotic goods, such as drilled and polished

pendants of human and shark teeth, ceramic beads, and carved mammal bone implements, appeared more frequently in Midden A2 than any other context at El Hatillo, with a ratio of about .001 to overall sherds.

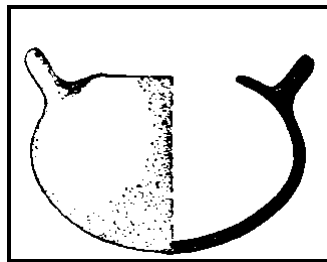


Figure 2.9. *Tecomate*. From Ladd 1964.

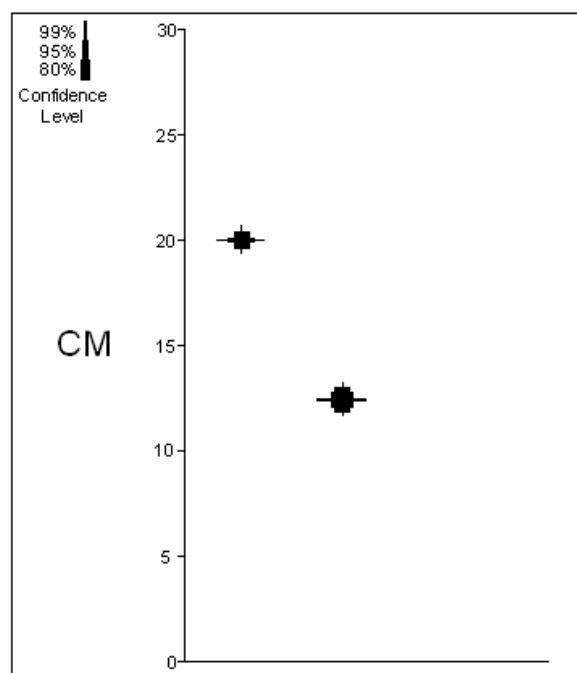


Figure 2.10. Bullet graph comparing average rim diameters with attached error ranges for two separate clusters of *tecomates* observed within the diagnostic assemblage from Midden A2.

## 2.3 SUMMARY

Like the deposits described in Midden A2, the high quantity of faunal remains from Midden A1 were also indicative of activities that involved more participants than would be expected of an ordinary domestic context. Thus, it appears that the “extra-domestic” activities that produced these remains involved villagers from multiple families engaged in somewhat exaggerated consumption of food and other resources (i.e., fancy polychromes), and that at least some of these resources, namely food, and likely the space for these communal events were provided by Household A during the Parita phase.

Remains dating to earlier occupational phases, namely the Cubitá, Conte, and Macaracas phases, were present in Area A in much smaller quantities than remains from the Parita phase. Cubitá and Conte phase remains that underlay Household A included refuse and a few structural features that were disturbed by later activities. Macaracas remains in Area A appeared only in the lowest levels of Middens A1 and A2. Thus, it would seem that Household A and communal events that produced Midden A2 had their origins in the late Macaracas phase. It also seems that prior to the activities that produced these later deposits there was a lapse in occupation, or at least a notable decrease in activities in this area, that began sometime during the later Conte and extended throughout most of the Macaracas phase.

### **3.0 AREA B EXCAVATIONS: EVIDENCE OF LONG TERM OCCUPATION AMONG HEAVILY DISTURBED REMAINS**

The part of El Hatillo designated Area B (Figure 3.1) during household level excavations was expected to produced evidence of craft specialization and the contexts in which it was undertaken within the village. At the community scale, this part of the site produced very high artifact densities compared to most other parts of El Hatillo, suggesting that it was a primary place of occupation, particularly during the Parita phase (Menzies 2009). Lithics appeared with greater frequency in community scale collections from this part of the site, and evidence of higher status residence occurred in the form of higher proportions of finely decorated polychromes and elaborate vessel forms (Menzies 2009). Area B also bordered the mound precinct, which represented the village's formal cemetery, to the west. Indeed, based on reports by Ladd (1964), it seems that Area B included at least one trench excavated by Sterling and Willey during their 1948 project at the site, which focused almost exclusively on mound burials. This trench was reported to have been placed in a low mound and to have yielded "only typical domestic rubbish" (Ladd 1964). This, of course, provided further support for the expectation that Area B would provide detailed data pertaining to elite households and the organization of craft production in and around them. Unfortunately, the proximity of this portion of the site to the rich burials of the mound precinct meant that it, too, became a focus for looters in recent years, and, thus, excavation encountered largely disturbed deposits. One of the few exceptions to this was a

probable Parita phase burial that was excavated beneath a midden containing refuse from the Parita phase. While this provided some important information, it also caused the landowner to halt further excavation in Area B.

Excavation of Area B began with the placement of several 1 sq m units within an area of approximately 60 sq m that was adjacent to one of Menzies' test units. None of these initial units produced more than partially intact deposits, so additional units were opened at slightly further distances, extending 10 m beyond the initial limits and taking advantage of at least one possible indication of intact remains (i.e., a low rise suggestive of a refuse deposit). Interestingly,

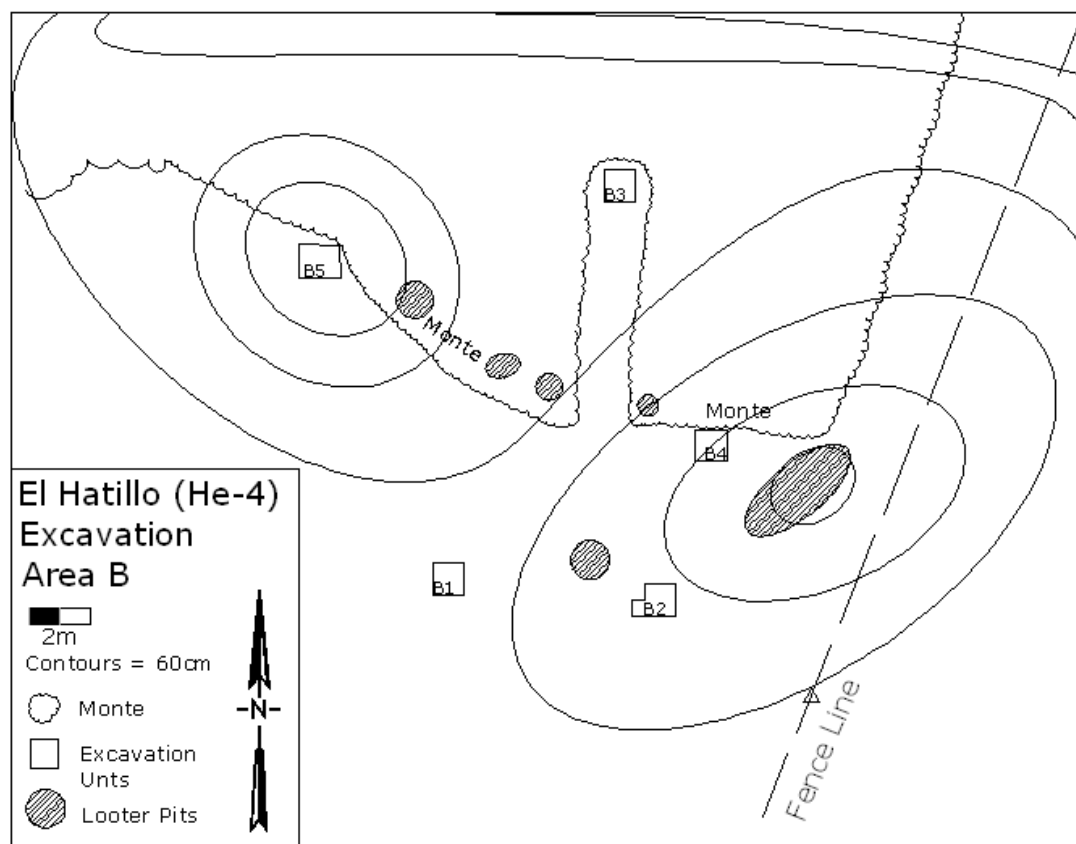


Figure 3.1. Plan view of Excavation Area B.



one of these additional units produced intact, but entirely sterile deposits, while the other produced the Parita burial mentioned above. In total only six sq m were excavated in five units in Area B, yielding one burial, later structural features, and evidence for continued occupation in this part of the village throughout the site's history. Finally, all of Unit B1 and parts of Units B2 and B4 were heavily disturbed, while Unit B3 contained no archaeological remains. Thus, Unit B5 was the only entirely intact archaeological context excavated in Area B. Nonetheless, remains in Area B were sufficient to distinguish at least two separate occupations in this part of the site.

### **3.1 STRATIGRAPHY**

Despite the heavily disturbed deposits, six clear zones were identified in Area B, and three of these had sub-zones, indicating contemporaneous deposits that accumulated separately or formed a distinct surface such as a floor. Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings, can be found in the online database that accompanies this written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

### **3.2 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY**

Despite the heavily disturbed deposits in Area B and the reluctance of the landowner to permit excavations to continue in this part of the site, useful information was obtained. First, it is clear, based heavily on data from intensive survey by Menzies' (2009), that the larger part of the

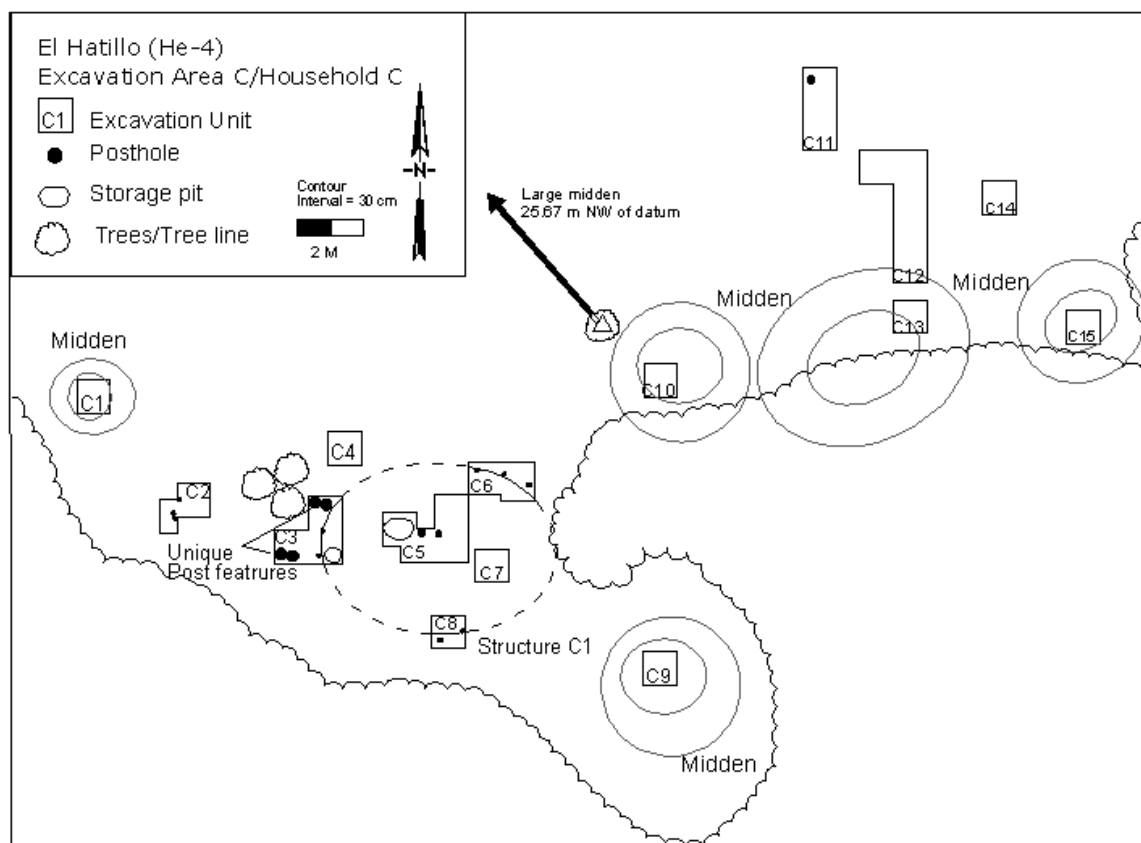
village in which Area B excavations were located (i.e., an area of about 100 m x 100 m adjacent and to the west of the mound precinct; Figure 3.1) was probably the most densely occupied area of the site during all but the Macaracas phase. This pattern was certainly corroborated with household level data in spite of the heavy disturbance to the area. Yet, it is interesting that the intact tomb that was excavated and the structural remains above it both date roughly to the Parita phase. Too little of the structure was exposed to gain any sense of its function, let alone whether it was part of a higher status residence. The tomb, on the other hand, seems to indicate more clearly that occupants of this area during the Parita phase, at least some of them, were of commoner status. It is interesting, then, that lower status remains were recovered and dated roughly to the same period that activity seems to begin to increase (Haller 2008; Menzies 2009). This represents a second important piece of information that comes from household excavation in Area B. Specifically, Parita phase remains that were exposed in Area B excavations suggest that some residents of this area of the village during the Parita phase did not necessarily enjoy higher status, suggesting that lower status residents might have lived near higher status residents and were probably engaged in production that was organized and sponsored by the elite.

#### **4.0 AREA C EXCAVATIONS: EARLY HIGH STATUS HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNAL SPACE**

Area C excavations (Figure 4.1) were located in a portion of El Hatillo that was revealed at the regional and household scales of investigation to bear evidence of long-term occupation and primarily elite domestic remains. Haller's regional survey produced higher proportions of decorated remains dating to all phases in this area of El Hatillo, but more were representative of Conte Phase occupation than any other. Further, the proportion of finely decorated ceramics recovered from collection units placed by Haller in and around the portion of El Hatillo that would come to be Area C suggests a locus of elite residence. At the community scale, Menzies' collection units produced patterns in the evidence that were very consistent with those observed in Haller's data. Remains recovered from community-scale collections in this area of El Hatillo were identified to all phases, but revealed higher proportions of Conte and Macaracas ceramics. These remains also revealed higher proportions of finely decorated sherds and a greater variety of vessel forms than surrounding areas of the site. Additionally, Menzies' collections suggested the possibility that axe production was undertaken with greater intensity in this portion of El Hatillo than in surrounding areas, and was perhaps associated with the remains of early elite residences. These patterns created the expectation that expanded household level investigations would encounter elite domestic contexts that spanned much of the Late Ceramic II period. The

possibility of an area of more intense axe production, suggested by the higher occurrence of debris associated with the production of axes during community-scale investigations, also raised expectations that broader excavation in this portion of the site would reveal patterns in economic activities, particularly specialized axe production, that might have had a role in certain households acquiring some level of authority over their neighbors.

Horizontal excavation of Area C began with the placement of 1 sq m units in low (~ 60 cm) rises indicative of midden deposits that lay in close proximity to one of Menzies' test units. The placement of the initial 1 sq m units took advantage of the fact that they occurred in proximity to higher status remains (based on Menzies' results), and also revealed one location likely to produce specific evidence of what domestic life was like in Area C and precisely what activities produced these remains. Additional units were placed in areas adjacent to these middens, which, it was presumed, would be likely to encounter associated structural remains to provide further evidence from which the spatial context of activities carried out by the prehistoric residents of Area C might be reconstructed. In all 28.5 sq m of excavation were undertaken in Area C, sampling five separate intact midden deposits and evidence of at least two separate structures. The evidence collected at the household scale was consistent with observations made from patterns that emerged at the regional and community scales. Middens produced higher proportions of decorated ceramics, particularly dating to the Conte and Parita phases, while structural remains were suggestive of at least one building that differed from the typical style of construction observed at the site. In general, household evidence indicated that this portion of El Hatillo was occupied by elites prior to the beginning of elaborate burials in the site's formal cemetery.



**Figure 4.1. Plan view of Area C excavations and features (not individually labeled).**

## 4.1 STRATIGRAPHY

Six separate zones were identified in the stratigraphy of Area C and labeled Z1 – Z6. Subzones were identified in several of these, indicating areas where a distinction in soil was visible, but did not represent a temporal break. For example, the soil excavated within lower strata of midden deposits was quite distinct from structural fill, but could be temporally linked based on artifact contents in each. Zones representing these strata were labeled Z3A and Z3B, thereby retaining the temporal link, but distinguishing them in terms of appearance and composition. Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and

descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings, can be found in the online database that accompanies this written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

## **4.2 DISCUSSION**

### **4.2.1 Overview of Area C Remains**

Household excavations in Area C produced evidence of continuous activity during most of the occupational history of this part of the site. Four separate middens – each apparent on the surface as a low rise (~ 60 cm) with higher densities of accumulated remains (e.g. ceramics, lithics, shell) – were sampled with 1 sq m units and produced deposits ranging from the Cubitá phase to the El Hatillo phase. Conte remains were, however, the most abundant in these deposits, indicating that the most intense activity in this area of the village occurred during Conte phase and tapered off sometime early in the subsequent Macaracas phase; remains from other phases, while present, suggested mostly ephemeral activities in the area at these times. Structural features (i.e. post holes, storage pits, etc.) exposed by excavation in Area C provided additional evidence of a domestic occupation, and Conte artifacts that appeared in the fill that overlay these structural features further indicated that activity and occupation peaked in this part of the site during earlier phases.

In general, it is clear that the early, mainly Conte phase, villagers living in Area C enjoyed better access to goods such as non-local ceramics that were adorned with socially significant symbols, and could be regarded as higher status residents. Yet, they engaged in

mostly the same activities and lived in mostly the same sorts of structures as their kin and neighbors who, for whatever reason, did not have easy access to goods like elaborately decorated polychromes from the contemporaneous and important center of Sitio Conte, 50 – 60 km north. But Area C was also distinct because the elites residing here during the Conte phase constructed a very large building, unlike any other structural remains excavated on the site, among their more ordinary household remains. Thus, these early elites may not have been sponsoring large-scale consumption of food, beverage, and fancy ceramics during communal gatherings like the later Parita phase elites in Area A (see Chapter 2), but they were apparently still, in a sense, sponsoring communal gatherings by providing the formal meeting space.

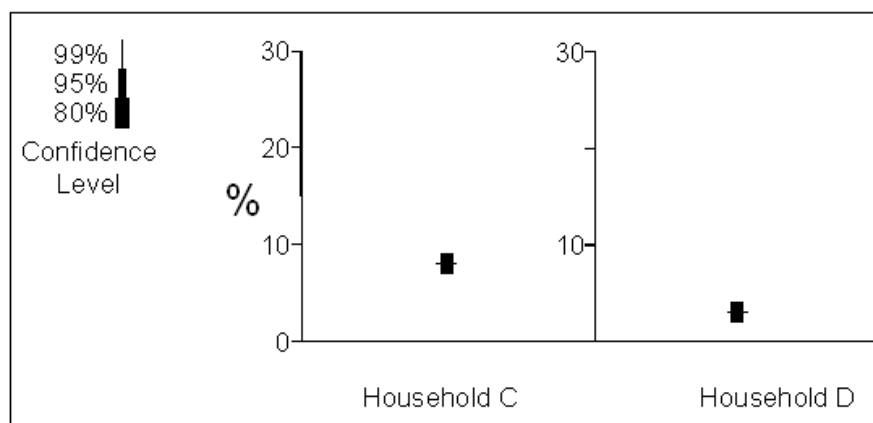
Finally, before moving forward with a discussion of the evidence from Area C, it is important to note that midden deposits for this area of excavation (as well as for Areas D and E, see Chapters 5 and 6) have not been separately labeled for discussion as they have been for Areas A and F (see Chapters 2 and 7). This is because, unlike Areas A and F, where communal events involving multiple households produced at least some of the refuse (Middens A2 and F2), it appears that middens across Area C (as well as Areas D and E) accumulated mostly or entirely from typical sorts of activities undertaken with the similar intensities (i.e., represent more ordinary domestic refuse). Thus, unless there is evidence that extra-domestic activities contributed to the accumulation of refuse, middens are not discussed individually.

#### **4.2.2 Reconstructing Social Activities in Area C**

Conte phase middens in Area C were characterized by a higher proportion of decorated ceramics ( $.08 \pm .01$ , CL = 95%) compared to other contemporaneous deposits (i.e., Area D, see Chapter 5) (Figure 4.2), and especially high proportions of the non-local Conte beige ceramics,

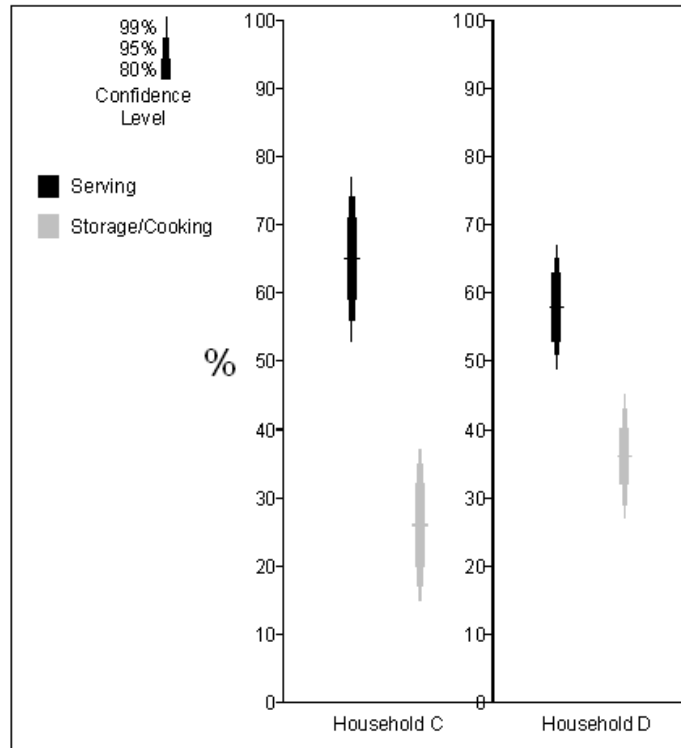
produced in the vicinity of Sitio Conte, some 60 km north of El Hatillo ( Ladd 1964, referred to as ‘Coclé White’). Among the Conte ceramics in Area C middens, 49% were identified generally as Conte polychromes, 26% were identified as the non-local beige paste variety, 22% were monochromatic Conte red, and 3% were monochromatic smoked ware. Finally, the 204 sherds from Conte middens in Area C that were identified to vessel type included a higher proportion of serving vessels ( $.56 \pm .07$ , CL = 95%), compared to cooking/storage vessels (.4) and ritual vessels ( $.04 \pm .07$ , CL = 95%) (Figure 4.3).

Lithics were somewhat scarce among Conte remains in Area C and included a total of 18 chipped stone artifacts, four groundstone artifacts, and seven polished stone artifacts. Faunal remains were also rare in Conte refuse, due in part to taphonomic processes and differential preservation. A total of 15 individual specimens could be identified only as large mammal or mammal, and two additional specimens were identified as deer. Such low quantities of faunal remains (a ratio of .006 to total sherds for Area C middens), regardless of issues of preservation, suggest smaller scale (household) consumption in this part of El Hatillo during the Conte phase.



**Figure 4.2. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing the proportions of decorated sherds to total sherds for Conte phase Households.**





**Figure 4.3. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of serving vessels and cooking/storage vessels to total sherds for Conte phase households.**

Excavations in Area C also revealed structural features nearby the middens described above. While midden deposits provided evidence that activities of one sort or another occurred within this part of the village throughout the occupational history of El Hatillo, structural remains in Area C were overlain almost exclusively by Conte ceramics, dating these structures to the Conte or earlier Cubitá phase. These structural remains are grouped into three sets, two of these were indicative of relatively ordinary structures and their associated features (i.e. storage units, etc), however the third set consisted of two pairs of postholes the size and alignment of which distinguished them from all other such remains excavated at the site.

The first set of structural remains, Structure C1, included a pair of postholes that measured 25 – 30 cm in diameter each and were spaced 22 cm apart (see Figure 4.1 and online

dataset). A series of three smaller (10 cm in diameter) postholes spaced 60 – 70 cm apart were excavated 2.72 m north/northeast of the larger pair of postholes. Two additional sets of similar (10 cm diameter) postholes, one about 2.3 m west and another about 2.5 south, were also excavated as part of Structure C1. Collectively, these features represented the structural remains typical of those excavated in other areas of El Hatillo during the same project, and appeared similar to verbal descriptions of some structures excavated at nearby Cerro Juan Diaz (Cooke, personal communication). Specifically, a pattern has been noted in which a pair of larger central posts was surrounded by smaller wall posts to form an oblong structure with a diameter of 5 m – 6 m. Lothrop (1950) describes similar structures that had been reported by the Spaniards ethnohistorically and are known to have existed into the ethnographic period. A possible storage pit was located in Structure C1. This feature was large and centrally placed, immediately west of the pair of larger central posts, and began in the occupational surface of the structure (40 cm below the modern surface), where it measured roughly 90 cm x 65 cm, and tapered to a depth of 121 cm below the modern surface, where it measured roughly 60 cm x 40 cm. The pit was filled with a very sandy, sterile yellow soil, distinct from the orange clay into which these structures were originally built.

The second set of structural remains excavated in Area C was located immediately west of Structure C1 and consisted of three smaller (~ 10 cm diameter) postholes – two spaced 5 cm apart and the third 45 cm from the other two – were located 3 m west of the larger postholes (see Figure 4.1 and online dataset). These smaller postholes formed a subtly arching pattern indicative of a curvilinear wall, and may have represented the western wall of a smaller structure. Two sets of particularly large (35 cm - 40 cm in diameter), closely spaced (< 7 cm apart) postholes were also part of this set of structural remains (see Figure 4.1 and online dataset).

These appeared stratigraphically equivalent to Structure C1, but were situated in such close proximity to them that the collective arrangement suggests these postholes might not have been precisely contemporaneous with Structure C1. These features were arranged such that the two sets of postholes were aligned with approximately 2 m separating them. Further exposure of these features not possible due to restrictions placed on excavations by the landowner, however, it appears that these paired posts represented an especially large building, perhaps one with internal divisions permitted by the use of strong internal supports. It is also possible the larger postholes served a non-structural role, such as bearing emblematic symbols (e.g. totem poles). Cooke (personal communication), for example, has suggested that the larger postholes might represent remnants of wooden sculptures similar to the stone sculptures that define a partially paved plaza at El Caño. Whatever the specific role, it is clear, based on the sample of structural remains excavated at El Hatillo, that some of the features revealed by household excavation in Area C were distinct. This raises the likelihood this space associated with an elite household was devoted in part to special activities during the Conte phase. The dimensions and arrangement of the remains, be they structural or emblematic (e.g., “totem” poles), also indicate that this space was suited to accommodating more participants than ordinary domestic activity would require. Thus, it seems plausible that these remains represent a sort of formal communal space among a Conte household.

#### **4.2.3 Comparing Conte and Parita Phase Elites at El Hatillo**

In many ways, the remains of the higher status Conte phase household described above closely resembled those from the higher status Parita phase household excavated in Area A (see Chapter 2, Household A). The size and arrangement of structures in both areas (excluding the

unusually large postholes in Area C) were quite similar - structures measured about 25 – 30 sq m in area, they were built using a similar pattern (two central posts and a series of smaller surrounding wall posts), and none had any formal or distinguishing features (multiple rooms, foundations, etc.) or more permanent construction materials (i.e., stone, adobe, lime plaster, etc.). The artifact assemblages associated with these households were also generally similar to one another. Each had higher proportions of fancy ceramics (i.e., intricate polychromes, and non-utilitarian forms like pedestal plates) compared to other such contexts at El Hatillo (i.e., Areas D, E, F), and lithics appeared in similarly low proportions to overall sherds in the refuse from each of these elite households, suggesting production was organized at a strictly household level to meet ordinary domestic needs. Further, each of the households contained roughly equivalent proportions of serving and cooking/storage vessels among their domestic goods. The one notable difference between elite contexts in Area C and those of Area A, however, was the very large proportion of faunal remains to overall sherds in Midden A1 (.37), and the very small proportion in Area C middens (.006).

Thus, the nature of elite contexts did not change much between the Conte and Parita phases at El Hatillo. Elite households were engaged mainly in domestic routines that were carried out across all households in the village regardless of status during each of these phases. But notable differences were observed in the nature of these contexts, as well, and these shed light on how activities and contexts that set elites apart within El Hatillo evolved over time. Later, Parita phase, elites in Area A engaged in much larger scale preparation of food, including large quantities of meat from a variety of animals, and were associated with contexts, such as that indicated by Midden A2, in which the communal consumption of food, beverage, and higher quality ceramics took place. Area C lacks any evidence of large scale preparation of high quality

foods for communal consumption. However, the remains of unusually large structural features that defined a sort of communal space in Area C indicate that gatherings of individuals from more than a single household – perhaps members of multiple households all of whom belonged to the same lineage or faction – occurred routinely enough in among the Conte phase elite in Area C to warrant construction of this formal space.

It might, then, be appropriate to characterize differences in “eliteness” indicated by the remains from Areas A and C as involving changes in the degrees of scale and formality. On the one hand, elites during both phases seem to have been involved in the same basic practice of sponsoring communal events by providing space to carry out such gatherings. During the earlier Conte phase this seems to have involved the construction of a large, formal space within or immediately adjacent to an elite household. By the later Parita phase, elite households seem to have taken on sponsorship of these events by providing large quantities of food. The events themselves, as indicated by Midden A2, seem to have the margins of elite households, which, by the Parita phase, were constructed in proximity to the formal cemetery within the village. Further, Midden A2 was immediately adjacent to an elite Parita phase burial excavated by Menzies (2009).

#### **4.3 SUMMARY**

In short, elites at El Hatillo seem to have always been involved in the sponsorship of communal events that probably involved extended family and, perhaps, members of the same faction within the village. Indeed, these events were likely the basis for solidifying cooperative relationships among kin and neighbors in the village, and also may have provided appropriate

contexts for forging new relations or resolving disputes that erupted among members or groups. There is no clear evidence of the precise nature of these communal events during the Conte phase, although one might speculate that Conte elites at El Hatillo were involved in, perhaps emulating, the activities that were undertaken at this time by the important individuals buried at Sitio Conte. Higher proportions of imported Conte beige ceramics among Conte phase elites at El Hatillo indicate greater access to non-local goods and suggest interaction with groups living in the vicinity of Sitio Conte. The intricacy of design on these vessels is, as many suggest (see Cooke 2005b, Helms 1979), indication of a highly developed religious system, raising the possibility that elites at El Hatillo were importing more than just fancy vessels, but the beliefs communicated in the iconography of the vessels. Whatever the precise nature for communal gatherings during the Conte phase, it is clear that such events had come to involve larger-scale affairs by the Parita phase. Feasts were apparently an important part of the later communal gatherings, during which the consumption of food, beverage, and fancy ceramics appear to have occurred on a large scale. These events took place in areas that can be defined as “marginal” to the formal cemetery, meaning that they were within 50 m - 100 m of one edge of the mound group at El Hatillo, and in the case of Midden A2 in particular, an elite burial was excavated alongside the remains of communal activity. Thus, one might conclude that these events were, at least part of the time, part of larger mortuary rituals. Space for communal events seems also to have moved further from the core area of any particular household by the Parita phase; that is, the evidence of feasting from later phases at El Hatillo (i.e., Middens A2, see Chapter 2, and F2, see Chapter 7) appears in areas that were perhaps more public, or communal, in contrast to the apparently extra-domestic structure in Area C that was built among more ordinary domestic structures and remains. Finally, by the Parita phase, sponsorship of communal events probably

happened primarily in the form of food preparation by elite households, as indicated by the comparatively enormous proportion of fauna in Midden A1, associated with Household A, and also might have come to involve some low level production of axes, perhaps controlled by the sponsoring household, as indicated by the comparatively frequent appearance of axes and production debris within Midden A2.

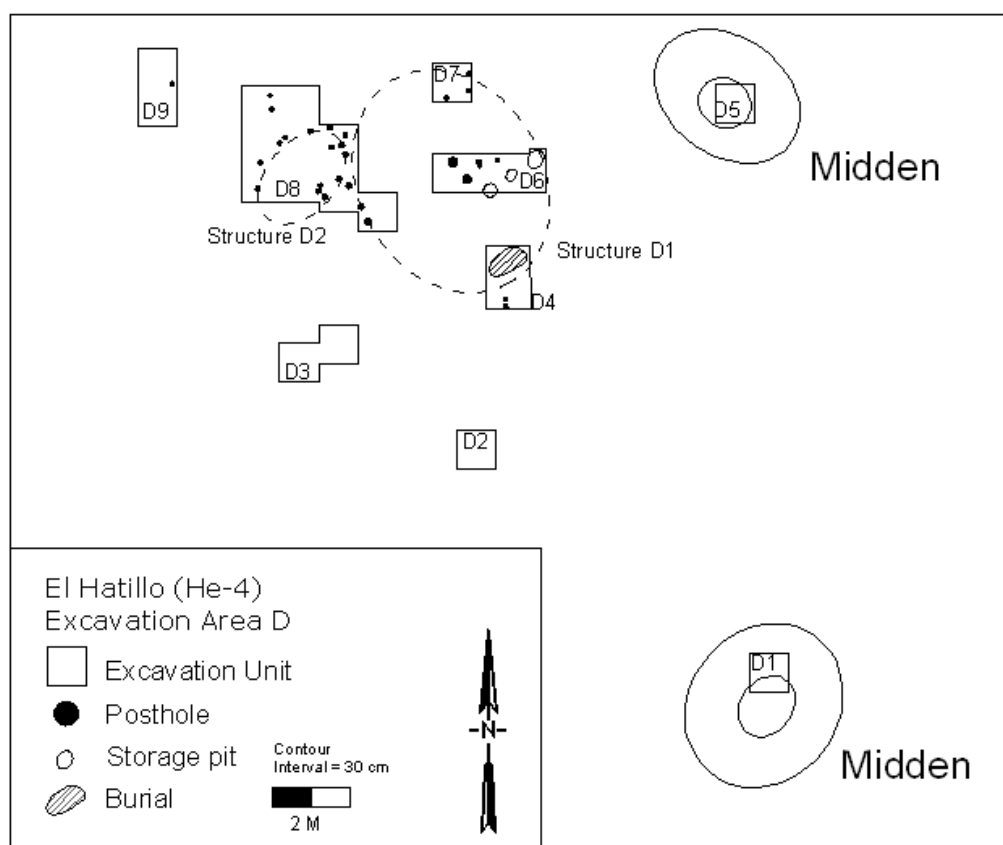
## **5.0 AREA D EXCAVATIONS: DOMESTIC ACTIVITY AND HOUSEHOLD SPACE AMONG CONTE PHASE COMMONERS**

A portion of the area of El Hatillo identified as Field 14 by Menzies (2009) was chosen for expanded excavations at the household level and designated Area D. During regional scale survey, Haller (2008) noted this part of El Hatillo as one bearing high densities of visible surface remains. Collections made by Menzies (2009) at the community, or local level, indicated that the remains in and around Area D were primarily from earlier periods, namely the Cubita and Conte phases of occupation. It was expected, then, that expanded excavations in this area of the site would yield evidence of earlier domestic activities at El Hatillo. Although non-local Conte beige ceramics were present in Menzies' collections in this part of El Hatillo, the overall presence of these in the assemblage – which in higher proportions would suggest greater access to non-local items, a possible indication of elevated social status – was lower than that of collections made in nearby Field 15, where Area C excavations were undertaken. Thus, household excavations in Area D were expected to produce evidence of ordinary domestic activities at El Hatillo during the Conte phase. Such data were sought to permit an important comparison between activities undertaken across households during earlier occupations, when the processes that lead to initial social inequality within the village probably began.

A total of 21.5 sq m was excavated in nine separate units in Area D (Figure 5.1), producing evidence of at least three structures, one burial, and one midden deposit. Excavations



began with the placement of a single 1 sq m unit (Unit D1) atop a low rise indicative of a midden. Additional 1 sq m units were placed at varying distances from the initial midden unit in an effort to locate associated structural remains. When structural remains were encountered, excavations were expanded to follow them. Generally, the evidence produced by household level investigations in Area D was consistent with those from broader scales. That is, remnants of domestic activities, including artifacts, structural remains, and mortuary remains, all indicated that this was the locus of household activities carried out during the Cubita and, to a greater degree, the Conte phase at El Hatillo. Some evidence of Parita phase activities in the general vicinity of Area D was encountered in upper strata (Z4A - C, below) a pattern noted in most areas of household excavation at the site. Most evidence from Area D indicated that the Conte residents that occupied this portion of the village lived a lifestyle quite similar to their neighbors in Area C (see Chapter 4). But several important differences were noted, including less access to non-local goods among the residents of Area D, and the absence in Area D of larger and more elaborate structural remains, such as the ones observed in Area C.



**Figure 5.1. Plan view of Area D excavations.**

All of Area D lay atop a narrow rise, which was bordered to the north and south by east-west running arroyos. These arroyos drain areas of slightly higher elevation immediately west of Area D during the rainy season. The narrow rise atop which Area D excavations were located was continuous with the “north ridge” – an abrupt natural increase in elevation evident within the formal cemetery at El Hatillo – identified by Sterling and Willey (Ladd 1964) and also reported by Bull (1965). The “north ridge”, so-called because it runs east-west across the northern portion of the formal cemetery, forms a distinct geographic feature, upon which at least two of the burial mounds in the cemetery were placed (see Bull 1965). This ridge extends to the east approximately 200 m, across a field covered by thick vegetation (referred to in maps as “monte”), and into Area D. An arroyo runs along the edge of the “north ridge” and forks near the

boundary as it meets the rise upon which Area D excavations were located. This arroyo then becomes the two separate arroyos that run along either side of the rise. The soils encountered in Area D excavations were generally much sandier than those in other areas of the site and the water table that underlay Area D was much higher than in any other area of household excavation at El Hatillo. These characteristics created generally poor conditions for preservation (resulting in a high frequency of badly exfoliated ceramics in Area D) and occasional flooding of excavations.

## **5.1 STRATIGRAPHY**

Five zones (Z1 – Z5) were identified in Area D excavations and represented the accumulation of remains from activities that dated primarily to the Late Ceramic I period, namely the Cubita and Conte phases. Subzones were identified in places where differences in soils were noted within the larger zones. Within larger zones (i.e., Z1, Z2, etc.), subzones (Z2A, Z2B, etc.) were stratigraphically equivalent, and indicated the different use of space within households (i.e., floors, middens, extramural activity areas, etc.). Subzones were further delineated (i.e., Z2B1, Z2B2) when it was necessary to distinguish between soils that belonged to the same feature or context, but had accumulated as a result of different episodes. For example, Z4B1 represents structural collapse that could be distinguished from Z4B2, which was accumulated refuse that immediately overlay Z4B1. Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings, can be found in the online database that accompanies this

written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website:  
[www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

## **5.2 DISCUSSION**

### **5.2.1 Overview of Area D Remains**

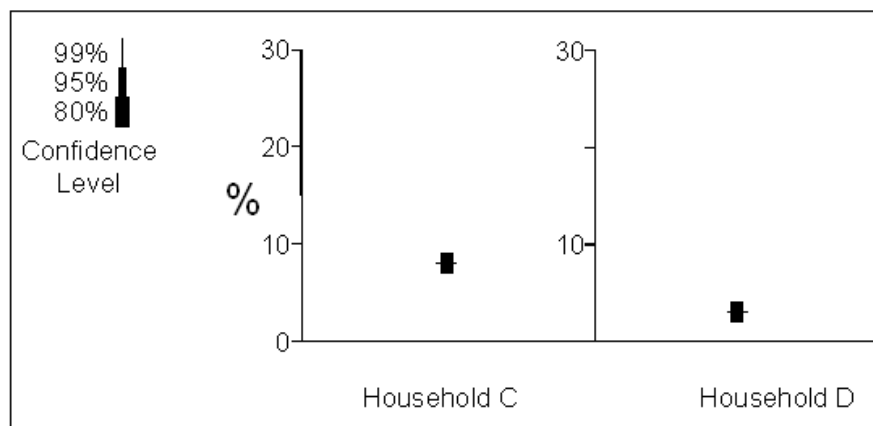
Area D excavations revealed substantial portions of remains from household activities dating primarily to the Conte phase. Structural features and artifacts attest to ongoing occupation of Area D beginning in the Cubita phase and extending into the Conte phase. There is little indication that occupation in Area D continued beyond the Conte phase, as Macaracas remains are almost entirely absent from the area and Parita phase remains occur almost exclusively in the upper post-abandonment fill (Z4A – C). In general, archaeological evidence from Area D did not suggest higher status residents in this part of the site. Lower overall proportions of decorated ceramics and non-local ceramics compared to other areas of El Hatillo, particularly the contemporaneous deposits in Area C, are one indication that the household(s) that produced these remains had ordinary status. Further, a nearly complete absence of faunal remains within Area D middens suggests that the Area D household(s) did not have access to a better or more varied diet - although this can, at least in part, be attributed to differential preservation, especially since relatively little faunal material was collected in Area C.

Two separate midden deposits were sampled with 1 sq m units in Area D; as with other such deposits, these were apparent as low rises (~ 60 cm) on the ground surface with higher densities of surface remains. Structural features were excavated in spatial proximity to the

middens in Area D and were overlain by dark ashy fill that contained mostly Conte phase artifacts. A tomb excavated beneath an apparent structural surface in Area D contained several complete Conte vessels, offering additional evidence of a Conte or earlier origin of occupation in Area D.

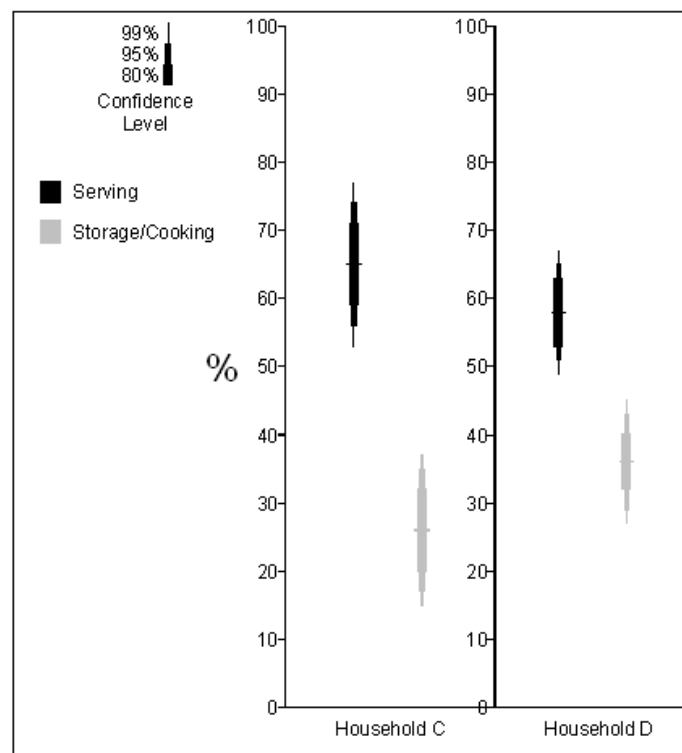
## 5.2.2 Reconstructing Social Activities in Area D

Compared to Conte middens in Area C, those of Area D contained a lower overall ratio of finely decorated ceramics ( $.031 \pm .005$ , CL = 95%) (Figure 5.2). Among sherds recovered from Conte phase middens, 59% were identified only generally as Conte polychromes, 11% were identified as the beige variety, 11% were Conte red, and 2% were smoked ware. The artifact assemblage from Area D middens yielded proportions of serving vessels ( $.62 \pm .065$ , CL = 95%), cooking/storage vessels ( $.34 \pm .065$ , CL = 95%), and ritual vessels (.03) that were similar to the proportions of vessel types in Conte middens from Area C (Figure 5.3).



**Figure 5.2. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of decorated sherds to total sherds for Conte phase households.**

Lithic artifacts, particularly chipped stone, were more common among Conte remains in Area D than in Area C, but still suggested only normal domestic production. A total of 18 non-utilized flakes, five utilized flakes, two cores, and 10 axe flakes (four with polish) were recovered from Area D middens. An additional 71 non-utilized flakes, seven utilized flakes, six cores and one exhausted core, four projectile points, two axes, two scrapers, two hammerstones, one *mano*, one *metate*, and 18 axe flakes (two with polish) were recovered from deposits that overlay structural features.



**Figure 5.3. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of serving vessels and cooking/serving vessels to total sherds for Conte phase households.**

Conte phase middens in Area D, like those of Area C, yielded a very modest ratio (.0085) of faunal remains to overall sherds. This assemblage consisted mostly of remains identified only

as mammal (n = 23) and vertebrate (n = 10), with only three specimens identified more specifically as deer.

Structural features in Area D provided additional evidence of Conte phase occupation within this part of El Hatillo. Numerous postholes were identified during excavation in Area D, representing at least two, and possibly three, individual structures (see Figure 5.1), as well as the maintenance and restructuring of buildings over several generations. Profiles from excavations revealed that these structures, while not necessarily precisely contemporaneous, belonged to the same occupational phase; a pattern supported by the largely Conte phase ceramics that overlay structural features in Area D, and the mostly Conte phase remains contained within the midden deposits. Several features resembling storage pits were also excavated among these structural remains and were found to contain only a few sherds.

Remains of Structure D1 included large (~ 25 cm diameter), paired central posts spaced 30 cm apart, as well as several apparent storage pits ranging in diameter from 22 cm to 35 cm. Additionally, three groups of smaller postholes (10 cm – 12 cm diameter) spaced 50 cm – 60 cm apart, were excavated as part of Structure D2. One group consisting of two postholes was excavated 2.68 m south of the twin central posts, a second group of three postholes was excavated 2.05 m north of the twin central posts, and the third set was excavated about 2.5 m west of the central posts. This pattern closely resembles that of Structure D1, and suggests a similarly sized structure. A second, smaller structure (Structure D2) was revealed adjacent to Structure D1 within a nine square meter area of excavation. Multiple postholes formed a segment of a wall that extended 3 m through the excavation and indicated the long axis of a relatively small structure (~ 2 m x 3 m in area). In addition to being small, structure D2 also lacked the larger paired central posts characteristic of other structures at El Hatillo.

### 5.3 SUMMARY

Generally, it can be concluded that the remains in Area D represent typical domestic activities dating primarily to the Conte phase. This conclusion is very consistent with observations made by both Haller (2008) and Menzies (2009) regarding this portion of El Hatillo. Horizontal excavations have provided a better sense of the immediate context of this portion of the site and, thus, lend greater insight into just how ordinary households were arranged during early phases of occupation. Clearly, Area D was initially occupied during the Cubita phase, but probably only sparsely. This occupation continued, uninterrupted, into the Conte phase and expanded during this phase. The occupants of the Area D household did not abandon earlier structures, but built directly on top of them, apparently remodeling and re-structuring earlier dwellings, rather than constructing entirely new ones. Feature D2 (a presumed burial) further supports the notion of ongoing occupation of Area D, as residents of this household interred their deceased relatives in the floor of their dwelling, which remained the place of residence for subsequent generations.

The image of early commoner domestic activity provided by Area D excavations is an important point of comparison to contemporaneous remains from higher status households in Area C, and clearly demonstrates that many of the differences between high and low status residents were subtle and probably not apparent in day-to-day interactions. Artifact assemblages in each area attest to generally similar domestic activities. Households in both Area C and Area D appear to have engaged in the production of lithic artifacts on a household basis and manufactured these solely to meet ordinary domestic needs. Although the ceramic assemblages between elite households in Area C and commoner households in Area D showed differences in the proportions of non-local decorated vessels (elites in Area C had more), the proportions of



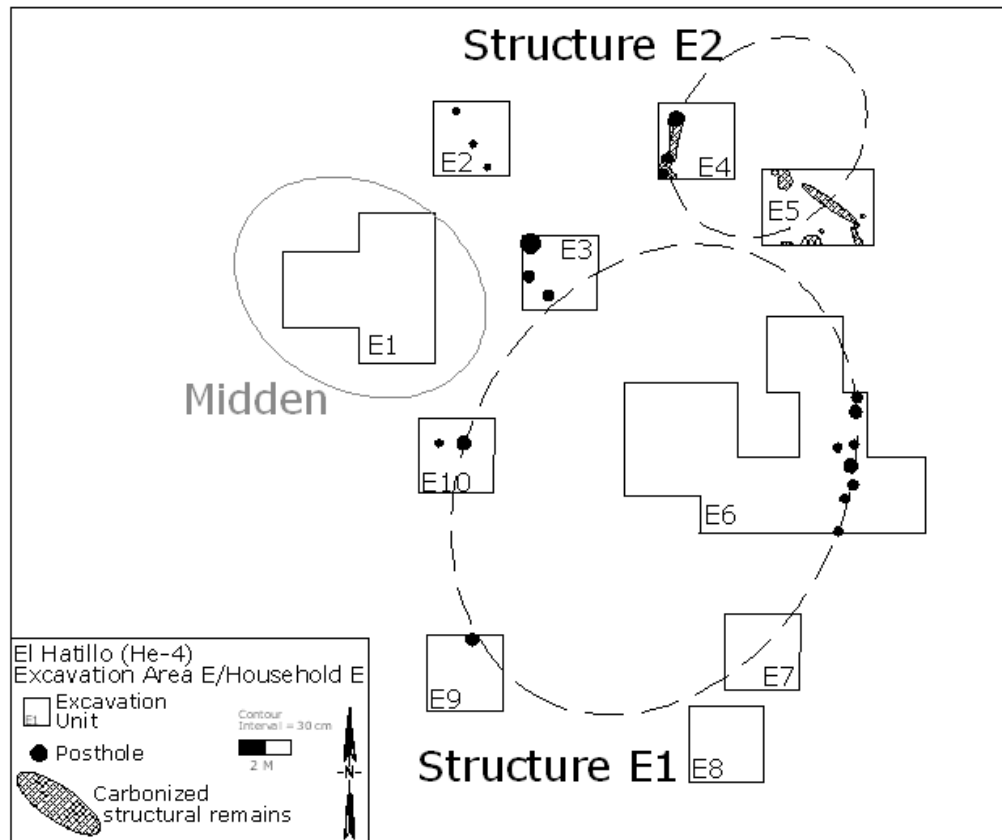
serving and cooking/storage vessels in each were similar, albeit slightly more evenly distributed in Area D households (see Figures 4.3, 5.11). This would also suggest domestic activities were undertaken with similar intensities. Also, with the exception of the uniquely large postholes suggesting a structure of extra-domestic importance in Area C, the structures were built in similar sizes and arrangements.

Finally, these data provide higher resolution patterns that further explain those observed by Haller and Menzies during their investigations. Specifically, Area D provided evidence of a more detailed nature with regard to activities and attributes noted at broader scales for this part of El Hatillo. At broader scales, Area D appeared to be one location of especially intensive activity during earlier, particularly Cubitá and Conte phases of occupation. The ability for Area D excavations to shed light on these broader patterns is especially important because, as noted elsewhere (see Haller 2008), it seems that whatever activities fueled the emergence of formal ranking in the Parita Valley were initially underway during the Conte phase.

## **6.0 AREA E EXCAVATIONS: DOMESTIC ACTIVITY AND HOUSEHOLD SPACE AMONG COMMONERS DURING THE PEAK POLITICAL PERIOD**

Areas of El Hatillo characterized by fewer varieties of artifacts and smaller proportions of decorated ceramics were regarded at the local level of investigation as likely areas of commoner occupation (Menzies 2009). Such patterns appeared in and around portions of El Hatillo that was labeled Area E during household excavation. Mortuary remains indicative of lower status inhabitants (i.e., bundle burials with few goods) were also encountered by Menzies' (2009) test excavations in this part of the site. Based on such evidence, this area of El Hatillo was selected for broader excavation to produce information on domestic activities among lower status inhabitants of the settlement.

Horizontal excavation in Area E totaled 18.5 sq m and was undertaken in units of varying size within an area of the site measuring approximately 80 sq m (Figure 6.1). Work was initiated with 3 sq m (unit E1) of excavation placed over a dense surface scatter of artifacts. A 3 m x 1 m trench (unit E6) was opened next, approximately 4.5 m east of the initial excavation units, and revealed a series of postholes. An additional 4 sq m of excavation (E6) were opened off of this trench to better define the structural remains. Finally, seven individual 1 sq m units (E2-E4 and E7-E10) and a single 1.5 m x 1 m unit (E5) were placed at varying distances from the central trench (E6) in order to locate edges of the structure and determine dimensions.



**Figure 6.1. Plan view of Area E excavations and features.**

## 6.1 STRATIGRAPHY

Four main stratigraphic layers were identified in Area E excavations. These deposits have been labeled numerically as Zones 1-4 (Z1 – Z4) beginning with the lowest stratigraphic layer (Z1), and are described below. Z2 and Z4 were each divided into three substrata, which are identified by a letter that follows the numeric label for these zones (i.e. Z2A, Z2B, and Z2C; Z4A, Z4B, and Z4C). Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings,

can be found in the online database that accompanies this written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

## **6.2 DISCUSSION**

### **6.2.1 Overview of Area E Remains**

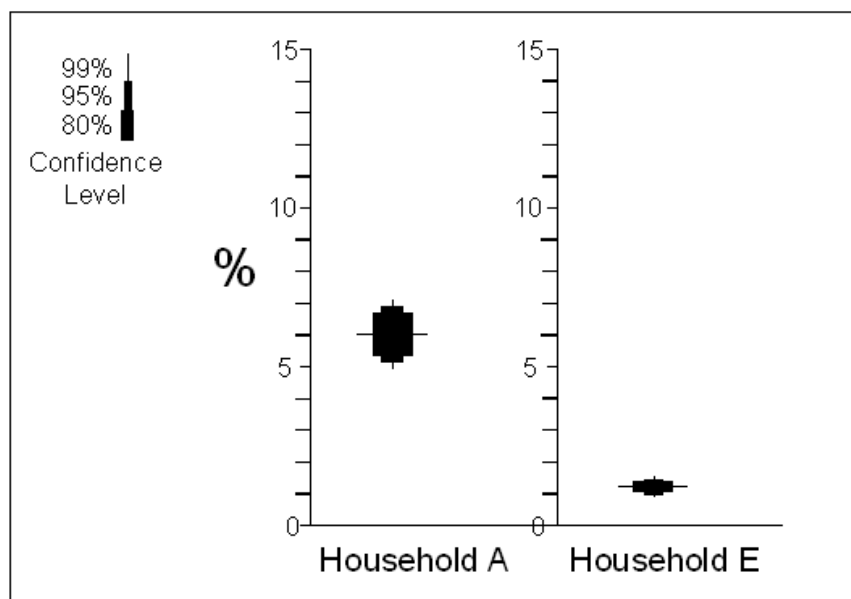
Areas of El Hatillo characterized by lower overall densities of ceramics and lithics, less evidence of long term occupation, and lower proportions of fancy polychromes were regarded at the local level of investigation as likely areas of commoner occupation (Menzies 2009). Such patterns appeared in local level data for portions of El Hatillo in and around Area E. Additionally, mortuary remains indicative of lower status inhabitants (i.e. bundle burial without offerings) were also excavated nearby (Menzies 2009). Based on such evidence, this area of El Hatillo was selected for broader excavation in order to produce information on domestic activities among residents that appear not to have benefited as directly from the activities that promoted higher social standing in the community.

Structural remains and refuse deposits in Area E indicated that this part of the site was occupied during the later Parita and El Hatillo phases. Evidence from earlier phases – Cubitá and Conte – appeared in very small amounts in Area E, suggesting the likelihood that prior residents at El Hatillo had settled in nearby areas of the site. Similarly, the few Mendoza Phase sherds that were recovered in Area E excavations indicated that occupation continued at El Hatillo in nearby areas following the abandonment of structures in Area E.

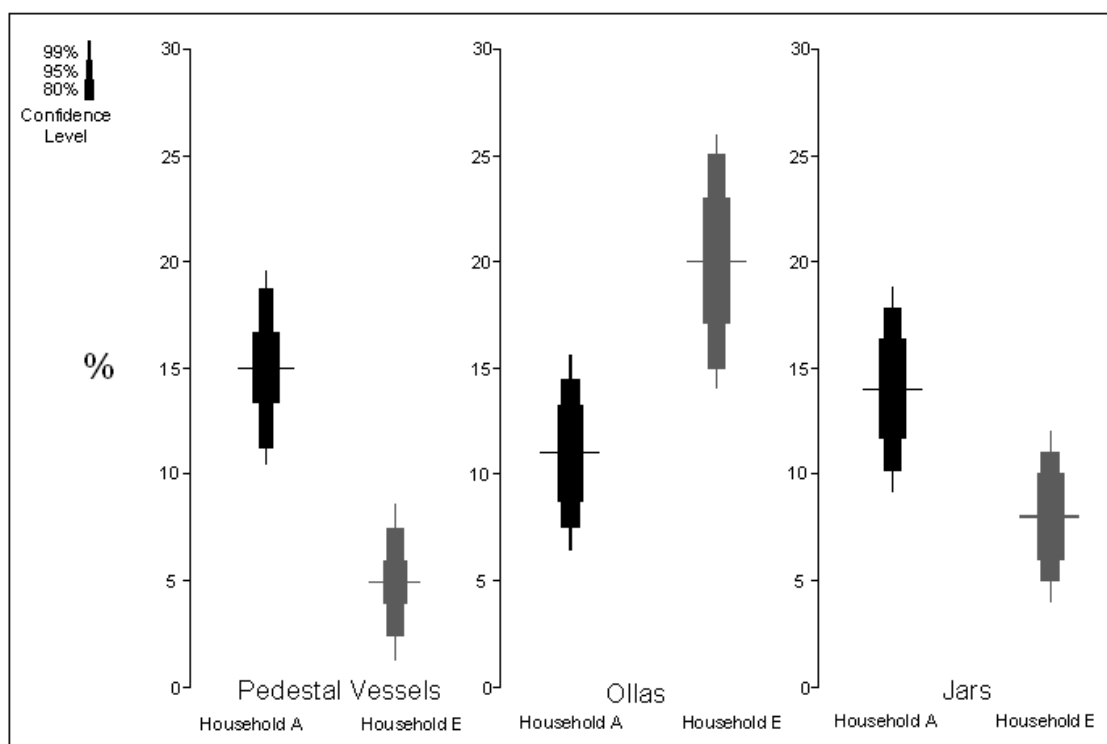
## 6.2.2 Reconstructing Social Activities in Area E

Middens in Area E were apparent on the surface only as areas of dense artifact accumulation and did not form low mounds as in other areas of excavation. A lower overall ratio of decorated to non-decorated ceramics (.013) compared to Household A (Midden A1) was noted for the ceramic assemblage from Area E midden deposits (Figure 6.2). Within this assemblage, roughly equivalent proportions of serving vessels ( $.44 \pm .056$ , CI = 95%) and cooking/storage vessels ( $.53 \pm .056$ , CI = 95%) were observed, as would be expected of a domestic context. A more detailed breakdown of these sub-assemblages better characterized this ostensibly lower status context. Most notably, pedestal vessels contributed a comparatively small proportion ( $.05 \pm .02$ , CL = 95%) to the overall number of serving vessels, and jars were somewhat less frequent in Area E middens, contributing only .08 ( $\pm .03$ , CI = 95%) (Figure 6.3).

Area E middens produced only a few lithic remains, including three non-utilized flakes, one utilized flake, one drill, and one *mano*. An additional 17 non-utilized flakes, one utilized flake, two exhausted cores, one projectile point, one *mano* fragment, one axe, and nine axe flakes (four with polish) were recovered from deposits that immediately overlay structural remains in Area E. These patterns resemble those of other areas of excavation and, like those areas, suggest that the production and maintenance of chipped stone tools was undertaken on a household basis throughout the occupation of El Hatillo. That is, evidence of production, namely cores and flakes, and evidence of maintenance, namely flakes, seem to appear in similar densities in all contexts across El Hatillo regardless of phase of occupation or relative status of a household.



**Figure 6.2. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of decorated sherds to total sherds for Parita phase households.**



**Figure 6.3. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of pedestal vessels, *ollas*, and jars for Parita phase households.**

Faunal remains were also scarce in Area E middens, with a ratio to overall sherds (.003) similar to (but lower than) those of Conte phase midden deposits in Areas C and D. The faunal assemblage from Area E middens was identifiable only to a very general level and included eight specimens of fish remains, seven mammal remains, and five shark remains. Given the similarity in ratios of faunal remains to total sherds for Area E middens and the older Conte middens in Area C and D, differential preservation may not be a sufficient explanation for the infrequent appearance of animal remains in Conte deposits; nor does it suffice as a way of accounting for the enormous difference in quantity of faunal remains between Area A middens and those of the other three areas.

Postholes and features representing localized burning of a structure attest to the presence of domestic buildings in Area E (see Figures 6.1 and 6.3 above). Two structures – Structures E1 and E2 – that were roughly (but perhaps not precisely) contemporaneous with one another were excavated in this part of El Hatillo. A series of nine postholes, all approximately 10 cm in diameter, were closely, but unevenly, spaced within a wall trench that spanned 2 m of excavation and formed part of the eastern wall of Structure E1. No evidence of paired central posts was located for this structure, but three additional groups of smaller postholes (~ 10 cm diameter) were located between 4.5 m and 5.5 m from the initial group of nine postholes and represented segments of the western and northern walls of Structure E1. These formed a slightly oblong building with a floor space of approximately 20 – 25 sq m. Portions of a second structure, Structure E2, were stratigraphically equivalent to Structure E1, but appeared only 1.5 m to the north. One group of postholes and an area of concentrated ash stains with patterns suggesting *in situ* burning of structural remains indicate that Structure E2 was probably smaller than Structure E1. Two postholes (~ 17 cm diameter each), which had also burned, were spaced closely

together within a wall trench approximately 2 m northwest of the ash stains and collectively indicated a southern portion of the second structure.

### **6.3 SUMMARY**

Area E was characterized by very ordinary household remains and little evidence that this part of the village had been settled prior to the Parita phase when Household E was constructed and occupied. Two nearby burials excavated by Menzies (2009) during community level investigations were also indicative of ordinary, or commoner, inhabitants in this area, since these were bundle burials that lacked grave goods. Household E had very low proportions of polychromes and elaborate vessels, which further indicated lower status residents.

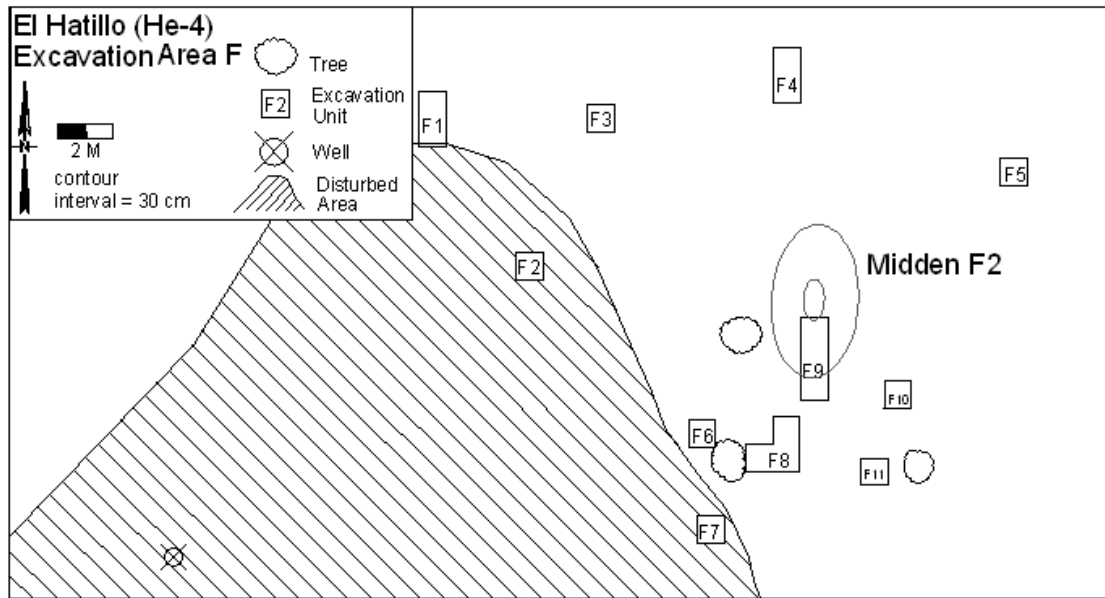
While Area E produced important contrasts in the make-up of the ceramic assemblage and its lack of evidence of long-term occupation compared to other areas of excavation, particularly Area A, Area E was, still, very much the same as the other households at the site. The structures, although stylistically somewhat different, were very similar in size. Further, the ceramic assemblage suggested that Household E was largely self-sufficient and participated in mostly the same activities as the contemporaneous and high status Household A. One notable exception, of course, was that Household E lacked any evidence that it was involved in the sponsorship of communal ceremonies in any capacity.



## **7.0 AREA F EXCAVATIONS: COMMUNAL EVENTS DURING EL HATILLO'S DECLINE**

Community scale investigations in and around the portion of El Hatillo that was selected for Area F excavations produced generally higher densities of artifacts compared to most areas of El Hatillo, but markers of high status were not as common at the community scale for this area as they were in Areas A or C. Thus, expectations were set for evidence of commoner habitation. Area F excavations included eleven separate units, labeled F1 – F11, and totaled 17 sq m in area (Figure 6.1). Structural remains dating to the Cubita or Conte phase were encountered in Unit F8 – a 3 sq m unit near the center of Area F – and had been partially destroyed by later Parita and El Hatillo phase deposits that overlay the earlier features. Unit F9 – a 3 m x 1 m trench excavated 50 cm north of the northeast corner of Unit F8 – attempted to reveal undisturbed portions of the structures from F8, but instead revealed a thin, but densely deposited layer of refuse. Large sherds (representing 10% - 25% of a vessel) from finely decorated polychromes that appeared in a variety of forms, including more elaborate pedestal vessels and effigy jars, were densely deposited in a relatively thin (compared, for example, to Midden A2, see Chapter 2) layer (Z10, see below) that was highly suggestive of short-lived feasting in Area F. The remaining excavation units were placed in surrounding areas in order to test for associated remains, primarily features. None of these units encountered any further evidence of habitation, and two

of them – F2 and F7 – encountered entirely disturbed deposits resulting from the construction of a well 12 m to the west of Area F excavations.



**Figure 7.1. Plan View of excavations in Area F.**

## **7.1 STRATIGRAPHY**

Thirteen separate stratigraphic layers, labeled Z1 – Z13, were identified in Area F excavations, representing primarily late (Parita and El Hatillo phase) occupation. Sub-strata were identified in two of these – Z5 and Z12. Detailed reports on these strata, which include soil descriptions, counts and descriptions of the artifacts, ecofacts, and features within each stratum, and profile drawings, can be found in the online database that accompanies this written portion of the dissertation, which can be accessed at the following website: [www.cadb.pitt.edu](http://www.cadb.pitt.edu).

## **7.2 DISCUSSION**

### **7.2.1 Overview of Area F Remains**

The portion of El Hatillo designated Area F during household excavation appeared at the community level to bear moderate to high densities of mostly ordinary remains from later periods of occupation (Menzies 2009). Surface remains in Area F did not form low rises indicative of accumulated refuse, as in Areas A, C, and D, but were similar to surface remains in Area E, existing only as small, but moderately dense artifact scatters. As in Area E, expanded excavations in Area F were expected to produce evidence of domestic activities among commoner residents.

Parts of two structures and several distinct midden deposits were encountered during expanded excavations in Area F. Structure F1, a Cubitá or Conte phase structure, underlay all remains in Area F, and was contemporaneous with the lowest layers of an adjacent midden deposit. Structure F1 was incomplete, having been disturbed by later activity, and no clear form could be distinguished from the few remaining features. The materials recovered from associated midden deposits suggested ordinary domestic activities and generally sparse population during this phase in Area F.

Evidence of a second structure, Structure F2, was encountered above the remains of Structure F1, and was determined to date to the Parita phase. Contemporaneous remains in an associated midden indicated that Structure F2 was, like Structure F1, part of an ordinary household engaged in ordinary domestic activities. Also like the earlier Cubitá/Conte structure, only a few features from Structure F2 remained, with the majority of the structure destroyed by later prehistoric activity and modern disturbances.

A dense midden deposit dating to the later Parita and early El Hatillo phases (Midden F2) was encountered while attempting to locate additional features belonging to Structure F2. The deposition of refuse in Midden F2 by the prehistoric residents of El Hatillo seems to have been partially responsible for the destruction of segments of Structure F2, although no clear stratigraphic evidence of this was observed. Further, the activities that produced this midden were not ordinary domestic activities, but rather, the participation of multiple households communally in events similar to those that produced Midden A2 in Area A. Differences were immediately apparent between these contexts (Middens A2 and F2), particularly with regard to relative thinness Midden F2 (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) and the notable presence of more El Hatillo phase sherds. Analysis of the remains from Midden F2 revealed that they accumulated later than those from the Midden A2, essentially beginning at about the time that activities associated with Midden A2 ceased. The communal activities that produced Midden F2 happened with less intensity and occurred over a shorter period of time than the activities that produced Midden A2.



**Figure 7.2. Photograph of Midden A2.**



**Figure 7.3. Photograph of Midden F2.**

### 7.2.2 Reconstructing Social Activities in Area F

More generally, a higher proportion of decorated ceramics than would be expected of a typical domestic context appeared within the overall sample from Midden 2 ( $.05 \pm .006$ , CL = 95%); although, this proportion is considerably lower than that of Midden A2 and slightly lower than that observed for Midden A1 (Figure 7.4). The difference between the proportions of serving vessels ( $.55 \pm .05$ , CL = 95%) and cooking/storage vessels ( $.40 \pm .05$ , CL = 95%) within the diagnostic assemblage for this context is slightly greater than that of others discussed here, but still reflects a mostly equal distribution of these vessels. However, closer examination again reveals patterns similar to Midden A2 with regard to the proportions of specific vessel types. The proportion of pedestal vessels ( $.12 \pm .03$ , CL = 95%) noted for Midden F2 is much higher than would be expected of a commoner domestic context, and more closely resembles that of both Midden A2 and Midden A1 (Figure 7.5). Further, *ollas* contribute considerably less to the assemblage from Midden F2 ( $.05 \pm .02$ , CL = 95%) than might be expected of ordinary domestic remains, while jars ( $.13 \pm .03$ , CL = 95%) contribute more than might be expected from such a context (Figure 7.5). Although it is important to note that the latter pattern is less pronounced in Midden F2 than in Midden A2.

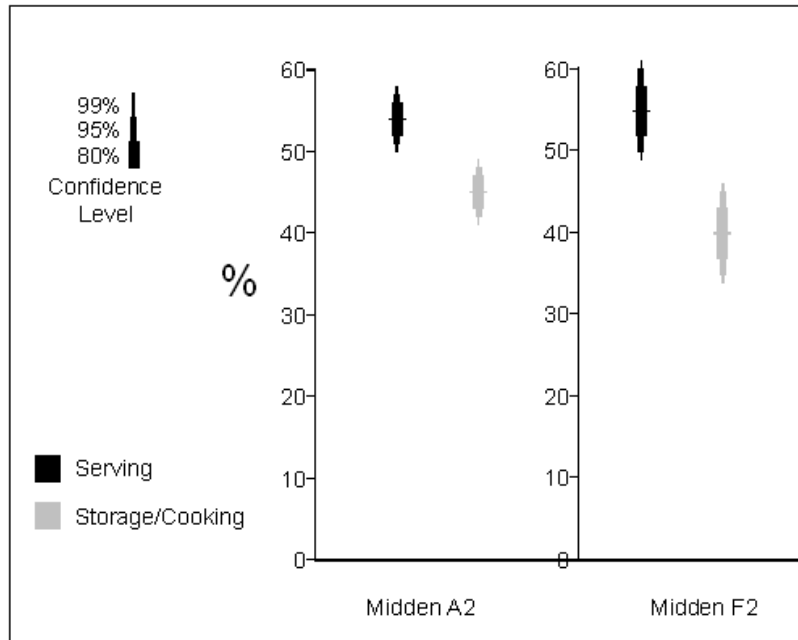


Figure 7.4. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of serving vessels and cooking/storage vessels to total sherds for Middens A2 and F2.

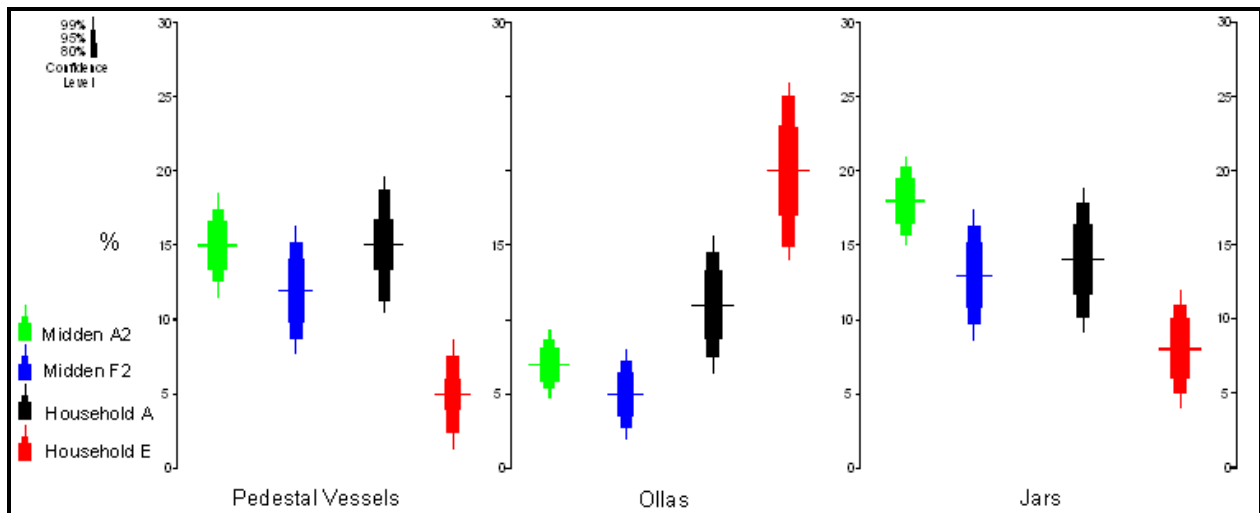


Figure 7.5. Bullet graphs with attached error ranges showing proportions of pedestal vessels, ollas, and jars for all Parita and El Hatillo phase contexts.

Lithic remains are unsurprisingly scarce in Midden F2, amounting to a ratio of only .003 to overall sherds. While the scarcity of lithics in Midden F2 comes as little surprise, the fact that relatively few faunal remains were collected from this deposit is inconsistent with expectations based on patterns in both Midden A2 and Midden A1. Faunal remains from Midden F2 amounted to a ratio of only .03 to overall sherds.

### **7.3 SUMMARY**

The deposits excavated in Area F during household level investigations revealed evidence of mostly ordinary households that were dated to two separate phases. Evidence of early residents (Cubitá or Conte phase) of Area F from both the local level (Menzies 2009) and household level suggests that this part of the village was probably only sparsely occupied at this time and was not the location of particularly intense levels of interaction and activity. Most remains from the earlier occupation of Area F are indicative of a single household engaged in ordinary activities. Structure F1 and remnants of an associated midden attest to the domestic presence at this time. These remains are, however, mostly disturbed and little precise information can be reconstructed from the few artifacts and intact features observed in Area F from the earlier occupation. Considerably more evidence of the later Parita phase occupation was observed in Area F. Although the remains of Structure F2 were not well preserved, higher quantities of artifacts permitted better reconstructions of Parita phase activities. Among Parita phase remains in Area F, low proportions of polychromes and fancy vessels compared to total sherds, scarce faunal remains, and very few lithics aside from what might be expected of an ordinary household all suggest that the Parita phase residents of this part of El Hatillo were, like

their predecessors, largely engaged in ordinary domestic activities. No indication of higher status or special standing of the residents of this household was apparent from the Parita remains in Area F.

The latest deposits in Area F, those dating to the late Parita/early El Hatillo phases, reveal a pronounced shift in activities in the area. Following the abandonment of Structure F2 and Household F1, Area F seems to have gone unused for several generations before once again becoming the focus of interaction and activity among the residents of El Hatillo. Evidence from Midden F2 indicates that Area F became the locus of communal events involving large-scale consumption of food, beverage, and fancy ceramics. No structural remains or other features were observed in association with Midden F2. But the proximity of this part of El Hatillo to the site's formal cemetery (~ 125 m south) might suggest, like Area A, funerary feasting. Whatever the specific social and spatial contexts of the later deposits from Area F, it is interesting to note that unlike Area A, where deposits extended quite deeply into sterile soil and demonstrated long-term communal events, those of Area F are quite thin and demonstrate very short-lived communal events. This pattern seems to correlate with patterns from broader scales of investigation that demonstrate a decreasing population at El Hatillo, and probably waning political importance and social influence as well, during later periods of occupation (i.e., late Parita/early El Hatillo phases). One might expect, then, that sponsorship of feasts by elite households would cease as the village of El Hatillo began to shrink in size and importance. Elite households might have lost members of their extended families and other factions that supported their elevated social status, as the residents began to abandon El Hatillo for nearby villages. Elite households likewise probably lost some of their bases for better access to resources at this time, which would certainly have placed limits on their abilities to sponsor large feasts for the community. Thus, it



would seem that Midden F2 records some of the last episodes of the kinds of communal events that characterized elite contexts throughout much of the occupation of the village.

## **8.0 CONCLUSION: STATUS DIFFERENCES AND HOUSEHOLD VARIATIONS ACROSS TIME IN A PREHISPANIC PANAMANIAN CHIEFDOM**

The results of community level survey and test excavations by Menzies (2009) at El Hatillo set the stage for household level excavations that provided fine-grained data suitable to revealing detailed differences in the organization of domestic activities and the contexts in which they were carried out. This information allowed for a clearer understanding of how differences among households reflected broader social differences among residents of the village. Comparing information from the preceding chapters provides important insight into the contexts of daily life at El Hatillo and highlights how differences in social interaction at broader levels – community and regional levels – were expressed in the daily routines of villagers. These patterns, in turn, provide a basis for assessing current ideas about the organization and interactions among chiefly societies of prehispanic Panama, and the development of early social inequality more generally.

### **8.1 SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS AT EL HATILLO**

#### **8.1.1 Patterns of Social Interaction at Multiple Scales of Analysis**

The greater density and diversity of archaeological remains at El Hatillo compared to other sites in the Parita Valley are as important as markers of the social and political primacy of the village

within the broader settlement system as the mounds for which the site first became known (Haller 2008). From the regional perspective, then, El Hatillo was not only a cemetery for chiefly leaders, but the center of social interaction and important political activity in the Parita Valley.

Closer scrutiny of the distribution of artifacts across El Hatillo reveal, somewhat surprisingly, that early leaders were not engaged in craft specialization or control over regional exchange, but rather that such a political economy emerged only during later phases of occupation, when the village grew in population and regional importance (Haller 2008; Menzies 2009). The overall household evidence for economic activities indicates, however, that even during later phases elite domination of resources and exchange appear to have existed at relatively low intensities, particularly in contrast to ethnohistoric reports of political economies at the time of contact (see Oviedo 1944; Espinosa 1994). Nonetheless, evidence for control over small scale production of axes and, perhaps, other utilitarian items, and access to greater varieties and quantities of goods (e.g., food items, such as large terrestrial mammals, deep sea fish, etc., and exotics, such as jewelry, finer quality lithics, etc.) indicate that later elites acquired the ability to control certain economic practices that were formerly carried out individually by each household. The earliest evidence for elite control of such activities appeared during the Parita phase and mostly in and around contexts such as Midden A2 (the remains of communal events), which were found to correspond temporally with the earliest mortuary monuments and the beginning of an increase in population and political importance of the village. One could imagine, without much effort, that after several generations of established and apparently stable leadership, challenges to chiefly authority might have emerged from elite neighbors within the village, perhaps leaders of political factions. One means of solidifying power over competing factions and fending off threats to authority might have been for existing leaders, and probably

their immediate kin, or lineage, to expand their base of authority to include practices that were fundamental to everyday life in the village (i.e., axe production, control over exchange) (Menzies 2009). But how a particular individual, or lineage, among the elites came to be in a position worth challenging in the first place remains the important question.

To explain the rise of incipient social inequality, Menzies (2009:192-194) points to the apparent longevity of certain areas of El Hatillo, noting in particular that the earliest high status communities in the village remained high status communities during the later phases of occupation. Such continuity is elsewhere associated with social systems in which unequal rights to resources are based upon the primacy of a household within the village (Fried 1967; Fortes 1953, 1969; McAnany 1995, 1998; Santley 1977); that is, founders settled places with access to the best resources and subsequent generations of the founding household legitimated their claims to resources based on descent from early settlers. Establishing land tenure over productive soils is an especially common scenario in which “founder household” models have been applied to explain the basis of social inequality (see Earle 1991; McAnany 1995). However, as Menzies (2009:194) observes, this particular explanation does not fit the case of El Hatillo, given the fact that the site is situated upon some of the least productive soils in the region (see also Haller 2008). Alternatively, founder households at El Hatillo might have made claims to high energy resource zones (i.e., coastal areas, riverine ecosystems) that were not contiguous with the physical boundaries of the village (Menzies 2009:194; see McAnany 1995). Yet the fact remains that areas of El Hatillo that were identified as places of high status during early phases of occupation produced little or no evidence that economic activities beyond ordinary domestic ones were being undertaken by villagers in these areas. Thus, evidence suggests, on the one hand, that founding households enjoyed higher status in the village of El Hatillo. On the other

hand, however, there is no indication that unequal claims to economic resources were the basis of higher status for these households.

To bring the contexts of daily activities into better focus, higher resolution data were sought from broader excavation of particular households. Select areas of the site were chosen for expanded excavation based on the results of intensive site survey conducted at the community scale. Areas of the site that were densest in high status artifacts were selected to expose details about the contexts and activities of elite households. As a basis of comparison, two areas of the site that were regarded as likely places of commoner households, based on patterns from community scale data, were also chosen for expanded excavation. The data collected from these excavations produced information about the layout and spatial organization of households (i.e., style and dimensions of structures, size and placement of storage pits, locations of activity areas, etc.), and details about the kinds of activities undertaken and the relative intensities with which they were carried out across the various domestic contexts. Differences between households, however subtle they may have been, would presumably be apparent at this scale of investigation; leaving the possibility that evidence of extra-domestic economic activity could still be encountered among remains of early elite households.

While the evidence that emerged from household level excavations demonstrated important differences between households at El Hatillo during both early (Cubitá/Conte) and later (Parita/El Hatillo phase) occupations, there was no indication that economic activities had any role in the initial rise of inequality in the village. Since early elite households did not enjoy their privileged status for any apparent economic superiority or control, it is reasonable to suggest that the basis of their authority lay generally in the realm of social interaction regarded as ideological. It is especially conceivable, based on the evidence, that the earliest among the

households at El Hatillo to acquire a strong and lasting hold on social authority did so by hosting communal activities that emphasized ideological themes of one sort or another (i.e., religious/ritual, social/political, etc.). Identifying the nature of these communal activities based on the evidence from household excavations allows for a precise understanding of how the first groups at El Hatillo to gain social superiority were able to do so, and how later elites might have expanded the initial base(s) of power over their kin and neighbors in the region.

### **8.1.2 Household Activities**

It is apparent from the data presented in the preceding chapters that Late Ceramic period (ca. A.D. 700 – 1522) residents of El Hatillo engaged in many of the same daily activities within domestic contexts that were in many regards quite similar to one another. Members of individual households all seem to have produced chipped stone tools for their own daily needs, hunted, farmed and processed some portion of their own food, and constructed and maintained their own dwellings. Remains of several of these dwellings suggest that they were typically around 25 – 30 sq m in area and that each was probably one of several structures that formed a household.

Household level excavations produced relatively little evidence of specific activity areas among domestic remains, but the distribution of lithics made it apparent that Late Ceramic period residents of El Hatillo preferred to manufacture chipped stone tools, or at least dispose of the by-products of manufacture, over recently abandoned structures rather than middens. This placed potentially hazardous debitage out of the way of daily activities (i.e. in nearby abandoned houses), rather than left to be swept up periodically along with other refuse. Hayden and Cannon (1983) discuss ethnographic evidence of such behaviors among Highland Maya, noting that members of communities routinely sort refuse by type and discard those types differentially

based on economy of effort, value of refuse, and hindrance of refuse (Hayden and Cannon 1983). There is a clear basis to suspect generally similar patterns among the residents of El Hatillo, and to consider that refuse disposal within the village followed particular standards and routines that all villagers practiced. The gradual accumulation of particular types of refuse in the same areas or spatial contexts (e.g., abandon structures) across the village and over the course of multiple generations of residents must have contributed a certain “fabric” to El Hatillo to which the all villagers adapted (de Montmollin, personal communication).

Members of each household probably also engaged in some aspect of food procurement. Projectile points, scrapers, and animal remains (some bearing cut marks) suggest that hunting and butchering were undertaken by members of households, while polished axes and groundstone implements suggest some farming and processing of plant materials also typically occurred within domestic contexts. Further, cooking/storage vessels seem to have constituted nearly half of the ceramic vessels in Conte households, and between half and two-thirds of ceramic vessels in Parita households (see Figures 2.6, 2.7 and 4.2, 4.3), also indicating food procurement, processing, and storage occurred on a household level.

Households that diverged from ordinary patterns at El Hatillo revealed evidence that they were capable of supporting activities that involved more than the members of a single domestic unit. The early elite household in Area C had features indicating the presence of either a structure of unusual size for the village and capable of holding a group of people, or an open-air space with large wooden posts, perhaps carved with symbolic emblems like the stone columns around the paved plaza at El Caño, 50 - 60 km to the north. Although these remains were in use prior to the appearance of the formal cemetery at El Hatillo, where residents of the village began burying the social elite in elaborate tombs during the subsequent Macaracas phase (A.D. 900 – 1100),

their proximity to those later burials suggest some continuity in the importance of this part of the village.

Later elite households from the Parita and early El Hatillo phases were associated with remains that indicate they were directly involved in sponsoring communal banquets during which varieties of animal meat, such as deer, iguana, and deep sea fish, were consumed in large quantities using intricately decorated vessels. Midden A1, which belonged to Household A, produced a ratio of faunal remains to total sherds of .37, fully two orders of magnitude greater than those noted in domestic remains from other areas of excavation. Yet no unique structural features accompanied this deposit, only the remains of a typical village dwelling. Instead, Midden A2, 45m east of Household A/Midden A1, provided evidence of communal activities that occurred in space immediately adjacent to this Household A. Indeed, Midden A2 lay between Household A (~ 45 m east) and the formal cemetery (~ 75 m southwest), linking communal events during the Parita phase to elite households, as well as to ceremonially important space. The particular activities to which Midden A2 attest – that is, large scale consumption of high quality food, beverage, and ceramics, or feasting – were quite likely part of elaborate funerary events associated with the mound burials in the nearby cemetery. But they reflect a broader continuity in the involvement of elite households with communal events, particularly as sponsors and hosts.

Finally, Midden F2 offers evidence that these communal activities carried on into the latest occupational phases at El Hatillo. The remains in Midden F2 were similar to Midden A2 qualitatively (i.e., higher proportions of finely decorated ceramics, more serving vessels and fewer *ollas*, etc.), but the activities that produced them occurred later than those of Midden A2, essentially beginning at about the time Midden A2 was abandoned, and with less intensity and



over a shorter period of time than those that produced Midden A2. Other nearby middens that were contemporaneous with Midden F2 contained much lower quantities and fewer varieties of faunal remains, suggesting that the banquets accompanying communal events were diminishing in richness.

### **8.1.3 Communal Activities**

The remains from Middens A2 and F2 and the structural features in Area C attest to the continuity of ceremonial events within elite contexts at El Hatillo. However, the absence of remains indicative of large scale consumption from middens in Area C strongly suggests that communal events from the earlier phases differed from those of the later phases. Middens A2 and F2 provide an important basis, then, for understanding the nature of communal events and how they changed through time.

The contents of Middens A2 and F2 are most revealing of the nature of communal activities during later times. Together, these middens span much of the later occupation of the village (late Macaracas through early El Hatillo phases) and correspond to the period during which elaborate burials were interred within artificially constructed mounds in the formal cemetery. The events that produced Midden A2 began during the late Macaracas phase in the vicinity of Household A, around the same time formal burial in mounds began, and continued in this location, although not with any apparent regularity, until the late Parita phase. At about the time that Midden A2 ceased to be used, accumulation of similar remains began in Midden F2. The events that produced Midden F2 were comparatively short-lived, however, ending around the time that the village began to lose population and apparent regional political authority (see Haller 2008; Menzies 2009).

Close scrutiny of the contents of these middens reflects the nature of the activities that formed them. Comparing vessel types in feasting assemblages, *ollas* appear in proportions that are similar to those found in ordinary domestic middens, while fancy jars and pedestal plates are relatively abundant. One interpretation of these patterns might be that the frequent presence of jars, a vessel often used to store liquid (see Rice 1987), indicates greater consumption of beverages (e.g., *chicha*) during these communal events. Further, the higher proportions of pedestal plates, an elaborate form of serving vessel, as well as fancy jars, suggest that the presentation of food and beverage was an important focus of these events. The fact that *ollas*, a standard cooking ware in the village, appear in similar proportions to those found in ordinary domestic middens also lends support to the idea that the emphasis was on the presentation, rather than the preparation of food (see Rosenswig 2007). Finally, ceramic analysis confirmed the observation made during excavation, that sherds from Midden A2 and Midden F2 were much larger (representing 10% - 25% of a vessel, on average) than those from ordinary domestic middens (representing <5% of a vessel, on average), regardless of vessel type. This indicates that fancy serving wares were routinely “consumed”, or deliberately destroyed and deposited among feasting refuse.

Faunal remains were more common in feasting middens, particularly in Midden A2, than ordinary domestic contexts, but remained considerably lower than Midden A1 (the atypical domestic midden associated with Household A). This raises the possibility that food for communal feasts was prepared nearby, such as the household of an elite sponsor (i.e., Household A), and transported to an adjacent communal setting (e.g., spaces around Middens A2 and F2). Further analysis of faunal remains might provide a better idea of whether or not this was the case. That is, if Midden A1 contained both ordinary, albeit elite, domestic remains from

Household A and the remains of food preparation for extra-domestic affairs like feasts sponsored by Household A, as has been proposed, then one might expect to see roughly equivalent proportions of the various animal parts in Midden A1, rather than higher proportions of edible parts. In other words, Midden A1 should contain as many less desirable parts from processing animals and preparing food for feasts as more desirable parts that might have been consumed by the members of Household A locally. Although no clear evidence was identified in Area F of an elite household that sponsored the events that produced Midden F2 (as with Household A and Midden A2), it is presumed that such an elite household existed, but was simply not encountered during excavation. Indeed, much of Area F was disturbed by recent activities (i.e., the placement of a modern well, the presence of a modern road, and the presence of an active household within close proximity [ $< 5$  m] from Area F excavations).

Exotic items, such as a polished and drilled human molar, numerous beads made from fish and shark vertebrae, and finely-made projectile points that were uncharacteristic of the more expediently-made tools recovered from most household middens (see below), appeared only in feasting contexts, particularly Midden A2, at El Hatillo. While the overall quantity of remains that were categorized as “exotics” was low in feasting middens, their presence alone underlines the social importance of feasts as places where rare items of special significance could be exchanged and consumed (i.e., disposed of among the other remnants of feasts).

Lithics appeared in higher proportions in Midden A2 than in most other contexts, including Midden F2, which contained very few lithics overall. Among the lithics that were recovered from Midden A2 three patterns should be noted. First, the highest densities of lithics in Midden A2 occurred in the upper layers, which dated to the middle to later Parita phase. Second, the lithics in Midden A2 were generally of a higher quality material and reflected more skill in

production than those typical of ordinary domestic contexts. Finally, materials associated with the production of axes (axe flakes, blanks, finished axes) appeared in higher proportion in Midden A2 than any other context excavated at El Hatillo. Thus, lithics were similarly scarce, or at least appeared in similarly low proportions in feasting middens as in ordinary domestic middens. However, the general quality of the materials and craftsmanship of chipped stone tools is much higher than ordinary domestic contexts, and the proportion of particular polished stone tools (i.e., axes) is higher than ordinary domestic contexts. The fact that most of this evidence appeared in the upper layers of Midden A2 would indicate these items became important, or at least available, to such contexts after feasting became an established social event at El Hatillo.

Generally, Middens A2 and F2 indicate that the communal activities during later periods of occupation at El Hatillo (Parita and El Hatillo phases) involved the consumption of large quantities and varieties of highly valued goods. In early high status contexts, such as Area C, there is no evidence of large scale consumption of food and fancy ceramics, as with later households. However, there is evidence that early elite households contributed space with some element of formal preparation (i.e., a large communal structure, or emblem posts) as a venue for important communal events. Based on reports from excavations conducted within the formal cemetery (Bull 1965; Ladd 1964), the construction of elaborate mound burials began at about the same time as the events that produced Midden A2. It is just after this time, during the Parita phase, that the population began to increase in size and quickly reached its peak. At about the time that activities that produced Midden A2 ended, those that produced Midden F2 began. These were comparatively short-lived, however, and seem to have shadowed the decline of El Hatillo as a primary center in the Parita Valley (see Haller 2008).

## **8.2 THE NATURE OF STATUS AND BASES OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AT EL HATILLO**

The quality that set early elite households apart from their neighbors in the village was the presence of space for more than just ordinary domestic activities. The events that took place in these contexts appear to have been communal, given the large features, indicating space or a structure intended to hold groups of individuals. By later phases of occupation the distinctions between elite and non-elite households became more dramatic. Elite households during the late Macaracas through early El Hatillo phases were associated with evidence of large scale consumption of high quality food, beverage, and ceramics that was situated in space between elite households and the formal cemetery. These later elite contexts also had more evidence of craft production and greater varieties of goods, suggesting that specialization and control of resources had become strategies to maintain and expand social authority. Thus, there are clear indications of changes in the activities associated with elite authority between early and late occupations at El Hatillo, but there is also evidence that the contexts of those activities maintained some continuity through time. The clear link between early and later elite contexts is the presence of extra-domestic space and communal activities.

### **8.2.1 High Status Contexts and the Role of the Elite at El Hatillo**

#### **8.2.1.1 Feasting**

Feasting is an event that is well documented and widely discussed in archaeological and ethnographic literature, and provides a clear example of the kind of activity that created Middens A2 and F2 (Dietler 1996; Dietler and Hayden, eds. 2001; Hayden 1996; Junker 1999; Lau 2002;

Lemonier 1991; Potter 2000; Rosenswig 2007; Strathern 1971). Explanations of feasting are many and varied. Discussions commonly identify feasts as ways of mobilizing and organizing labor, as payment or recognition for assistance, as celebrations for socially important events, or as a way of commemorating someone (i.e., funerals) or something (i.e., anniversaries) that was important to a group (Dietler 1996; Hayden 1996). These specific reasons for feasts are tied to broader social constructs; meaning feasts have economic, ideological, and political implications beyond the immediate events and participants involved (Hayden 1996, 2001).

The fact that feasting is a near universal social practice means that feasts do not, in and of themselves, represent a single basis of authority. That is, for example, it cannot be presumed based on the presence of feasting remains like those of Middens A2 and F2 at El Hatillo that status within the village emerged around competitions focused on impressing and accruing followers by hosting feasts (see Hayden 1996). Feasts are, indeed, important contexts for accentuating status differences, and provide a setting in which social bonds can be formed that recognize status differences at the same time they reinforce community membership and cohesion (Dietler 1996; Hayden 1996; Rosenswig 2007). But feasts were neither the means by which formal systems of rank first emerged, nor the means by which authority was later expanded at El Hatillo. Instead, feasts, as social contexts, provided the appropriate circumstances in which to express social authority and reinforce the system that existed. It is important, then, to try to understand why certain among the Parita phase households at El Hatillo were able to sponsor feasts, and to determine who participated in such events and how they participated (i.e., contributing labor, contributing goods or materials, receiving goods and materials, audience/participants in ritual performance, etc.).

At El Hatillo, feasts provided a setting where elites could convey their importance more clearly within the community. By sponsoring such events these leaders effectively demonstrated their social standing and reminded their commoner neighbors that inequalities, however subtle in day-to-day activities within the village, were nonetheless present in the social order of the Parita Valley. Prehispanic elites at El Hatillo sponsored feasts by providing, and possibly preparing, food and beverage, and contributing the fancy wares for the presentation of food and beverage. Most of these fancy serving wares were consumed – that is, deliberately discarded along with other remnants of feasts – as indicated by the large sherds and whole vessels that are relatively common to feasting middens at El Hatillo. But it also seems likely, based on the low proportions of fancy vessel types and polychromes in non-elite contexts (see Figures 2.2, 2.3 and 6.7 and 6.8), that some of these vessels, replete with symbols of group identity, were carried away as important relics of these events by commoner participants.

The polychromes from Central Panama that are elaborately decorated in the ‘Gran Coclé’ semiotic tradition represent the region’s most impressive artifacts. They are well known for the intricacy of painted designs and high level of craftsmanship, and the iconography they display is indicative of a belief system that underlay their importance and played a central role in the society (Cooke 2004a, 2004b; Cooke and Sánchez 2000; Cooke et al. 1998; Helms 1977 1979, 1981, 1995, 2000;). The distribution of such designs on ceramics across the village of El Hatillo, the Parita Valley, and Central Panama more broadly, reflects broad participation in a common belief system throughout the region. While particular symbols might have been unique to particular groups, the symbols were part of a single, recognized system. Cooke (2004a, 2004b), for example, has proposed that the anthropomorphic symbols that adorn vessels from the ‘Gran Coclé’ tradition might have served as totemic signs that represented dominant clans from the

region, providing a ready example of the sort of broad and unifying ideology these symbols expressed. If, as the evidence at El Hatillo suggests, the elite who had greater access to these items shared them with their commoner neighbors, then the elite probably sought to distribute more than just fancy serving wares. That is, highly visible crafts, such as serving vessels, and the symbolism in their decoration were important forms of communication, and served to reinforce group identity and membership (Hodder 1982; Wattenmaker 1998; Wobst 1977; Vaughn 2004). During earlier phases, polychromes obtained from the region of Sitio Conte, some 50 – 60 km north of El Hatillo, were present in both elite and commoner households across El Hatillo; although in much higher quantities in the former than the latter (Chapters 4 and 5; see also Menzies 2009). During later phases (i.e., Macaracas, Parita, and El Hatillo) fancy polychromes were probably produced locally, but still followed a similar distribution within the village of El Hatillo (i.e., appearing in both commoner and elite contexts, but much more frequently in elites). Thus, elites at El Hatillo seem to have controlled the distribution (evidence of ceramic production is scarce) of fancy polychromes at El Hatillo throughout all occupational phases.

At the same time that the polychromes consumed and shared during feasts emphasized inclusive elements of the society, they also expressed divisive ones. The ability to produce such goods – in terms of both the skill and knowledge required to fashion and paint a vessel, and the knowledge to precisely reproduce codified symbols in meaningful ways, a sort of symbolic literacy – was a clear expression of elite authority (Helms 1993). While there is, as yet, no clear evidence of where or under what social circumstances the Late Ceramic period polychromes of Central Panama were produced, it is clear that elite members of society had greater access to them and control over their distribution.



It appears, then, that elites at El Hatillo created contexts – spatially and socially – that enabled them to express ideological principles aimed at reinforcing group integration among members of communities (e.g., lineages, corporate groups, political factions, etc.). This involved a conspicuous generosity among elite sponsors, in provisioning of high quality foods and the fancy wares to serve them, and an ostentatious show of wealth and power, in consuming such large quantities and varieties high quality goods. This sort of social expression, what the French philosopher Bataille (1985:118) referred to in his treatise on expenditure as the “so-called unproductive forms of expenditure”, gives meaning to wealth because it subjects the wealth to loss. In other words, social rank is linked with the ability to accrue wealth and possess fortune “only on the condition that the fortune be partially sacrificed in unproductive social expenditures such as festivals, spectacles, and games” (Bataille 1985:123). The potlatch is the most commonly cited example of such social practice, and is regarded by Bataille as an archaic form of exchange. As such, the potlatch demonstrates that exchange, as a fundamentally human social practice, does not have origins in the need to acquire goods, but in the need to spend goods in seemingly unproductive and elaborate ways that constitute “a positive property loss - from which spring nobility, honor, and rank” in hierarchical societies (Bataille 1985:122).

#### **8.2.1.2 Founders, Descent, and Inequality**

In societies that are organized by lineages, elevated status is typically associated with ideological importance (Fried 1967; Santley 1977). As the closest living relative to an apical ancestor, the lineage head is accorded important privilege and authority by relatives (Freedman 1970; Fried 1967). The position of lineage head also carries with it obligations to perform ceremonies focused on placating the ancestors and ensuring their benevolence toward their living descendents. But such acts are of broader social importance as well, since they serve to

demonstrate the basis of relationships within the lineage (ancestors) emphasizing common ties and integration among members, promoting the continuity of the lineage (Freedman 1970; Fried 1967). Thus, the veneration of deceased members of the lineage and the worship of apical ancestors (McAnany 1995) symbolically tied the fortunes of the community, or lineage, to forces beyond the living, but, perhaps more importantly, served to reinforce group identity and strengthen ties among the living members.

Models that identify the importance of founder households within communities emphasize ancestor veneration as a way to legitimate claims of the founding households to economic resources (McAnany 1995; Santley 1977, 1993). This, of course, places the control over valuable resources, land or otherwise, at the base of inequality. Indeed, from the modern perspective, the lineage as a resource holding group is something of a classic topic in the literature (Befu and Plotnicov 1962; Brumfiel and Fox 1996; Fried 1967; Hayden and Cannon 1982; Marcus and Flannery 1996). But it is also possible to identify cases in which claims to resources were not the primary basis of inequality. Instead the role and responsibilities of the lineage head formed the basis of authority in some cases. This is not to say that in such cases rights to land and resources were not also important, but rather prestige and influence acquired by hosting communal ceremonies translated into recognized authority and social power more readily than that acquired through access to better resources. Some elements typical of ancestor veneration, such as communal ceremony and commemorative banquets, served to reinforce the social cohesiveness among households that formed a community, while other elements, such as private ritual and rites performed by a religious specialist, incorporated inequality among the community because only a single individual, or perhaps a single household, had the ability to perform such rites (Hastorf 2003). This, of course, presumes that these early communities

consisted of members of the same lineage, and that the religious specialists were lineage heads who could demonstrate their greater proximity to the ancestors by sponsoring and providing the space for communal events and possessing the knowledge to properly perform religious rites. In a sense, then, this scenario regards religious, or esoteric, knowledge and practice as yet another kind of resource available to founding households and places control of such resources at the foundation of inequality in early communities.

An example of one such scenario can be found among later Neolithic remains from the middle and lower Yellow River Valley in China, where the first unambiguous evidence of status differences during the pre-dynastic period appeared in the form of religious items related to an “institutionalized ancestor cult” (Wheatley 1971:27-28). Wheatley (1971) notes that the rise of an ancestor cult and the associated practice of scapulimancy during earlier Neolithic periods set the stage for the emergence of specialized priests during the later Neolithic, who, based on early elite burials such as those from the site of Liang-ch’eng Chen, became the first formally recognized leaders. Similarly, Liu (2004) states that the earliest clear evidence of differences in social status within pre-Dynastic Chinese villages comes from later Neolithic mortuary remains. The Yangshao phase cemetery at Qinghai provides one such example, where “the relationship between religious power and high social status is evident”, although “there is no evidence for economic inequality among the members of the community” (Liu 2004:155). While elites in early Chinese societies seem to have expanded their basis of authority by the end of the Neolithic to include control over the production and distribution of ritual paraphernalia, it seems clear that hierarchical social systems first emerged around “high-status ritual practitioners” of ancestral rites (Liu 2004; Wheatley 1971). Further, religious specialization, ritual performance, and hosting communal feasts to commemorate and honor apical ancestors remained primary sources

of legitimacy for leaders throughout pre-Dynastic and early Dynastic societies (Freedman 1970, 1966; Liu 2004; Wheatley 1971).

At the site of Chiripa in the Titicaca Basin of highland Bolivia, Hastorf (2003) has also identified evidence that communal worship of ancestors lay at the base of the formation of early hierarchical societies. The practice of ancestor worship is evident at Chiripa among the remains of the earliest households, and suggest that the rituals and setting were somewhat less elaborate at this time, but nonetheless important to daily life (Hastorf 2003). Mortuary buildings, which housed the remains of important ancestors and provided venues for communal ceremonies held in their honor emerged and reflect increasing elaboration and ritualization of ancestral ceremonies through time. Specifically, Hastorf (2003:326-328) suggests increasing size of mortuary buildings both required the participation of more members of the community to construct and allowed more space for participation of community members in ceremonies, thereby creating a sense of shared cultural identity among growing populations. At the same time, increasing elaboration of the mortuary buildings involved complex symbolism and more space for private ritual to emphasize specialized religious rites paid to ancestors by lineage heads, thus expressing the clear basis for inequality in these early societies (Hastorf 2003).

These cases demonstrate the range of ways that have been identified archaeologically in which elites utilized and emphasized ties to founders of communities in order to promote and sustain their own social status. While none of these cases provides a “perfect fit” as a model for the scenario that was in place at El Hatillo during the regional Late Ceramic period, they demonstrate the effectiveness that such strategies had in promoting inequality within communities. There is, of course, certain “common sense” logic to the simple (and enduring) strategy of “squatter’s rights”. But these cases demonstrate that complex social institutions (e.g.,

political economies, religious systems, etc.) that incorporate specific strategies of power, like the control of economic or ideological resources, are built upon (i.e., legitimated by) the more fundamental strategy of elevating social status by emphasizing ties to founders.

At El Hatillo, elites initially gained status by emphasizing their descent from founding households in the context of communal ceremonies that honored ancestors. Like the case of Chiripa, the ceremonies hosted by early elites at El Hatillo were less elaborate than later ones, but nonetheless became the proper contexts to encourage the growth of budding social inequality in the village. Unlike Chiripa, however, El Hatillo elites did not become ritual specialists who further solidified their status by possessing esoteric knowledge to conduct and perform private and public rituals. Instead, these elites seem to have been gaining mostly from their ability to promote a shared identity among members of the community and to remind them of their place within the community by hosting and coordinating communal gatherings. Their right to host such gatherings and their legitimacy as leaders within the broader community was, of course, derived from the direct descent from the village's founders.

To be sure, this is a sort of ideological basis of authority, and no doubt one that relied to a degree upon religious symbolism and action. But, the substance of this sort of ideological power lay not in the leader's religious knowledge or ability, but in the leader's ability to effectively demonstrate his or her proximity to a founding household in the village and simultaneously energize a sense of belonging among the members of the community. In other words, it could be said that religious and economic power were ultimately contingent, in this case, upon the effective maintenance of group cohesion and participation.

### 8.2.2 Ideological Sources of Social Power

To better understand the nature of emergent social power at El Hatillo and the developmental trajectory it followed through time in the village, it is necessary to define more precisely the kinds of activities that were taking place in the communal contexts that distinguish elite households at the site. In particular, it is important to clarify the nature of ideology as a source of social power.

Mann (1986:23-24) describes two main types of ideology as sources of social authority. The first, *transcendent*, or religious and ritually themed ideology, transcends political and economic realms of interaction and emphasizes the integration of societies under a well defined set of beliefs about the supernatural that can be manufactured and presented to create a social network (Mann 1986:23). The second type of ideology that Mann (1986:24) defines is ideology as *immanent morale*, or ideologies that intensify “the cohesion, the confidence, and, therefore, the social power of an already established social group”. This ideology is distinct from the former type for two main reasons. First, they do not emphasize religious and supernatural themes, but rather themes focused on social identities and integration. Second, ideology as immanent morale reinforces existing ideas and beliefs about social relationships and group membership, rather than manufacturing a system of ideas and beliefs that is intended to unify a group. In other words, immanent morale extends existing group identities, while transcendent ideologies often manufacture new identities that unite people. This distinction has obvious general importance and utility in identifying the particular activities that defined trajectories toward increased social authority. It is simply not sufficient to state that activities were of an ideological nature, and it is hasty to presume that ideological activities in prehistoric societies like that of the Río Parita Valley were routinely religious.

With regard to the case of El Hatillo and the emergence of early elites, the distinction between fundamentally religious ideologies and those of a more social nature is especially useful in teasing out precisely how early elites advanced their social standing within the community, and the existing conditions in which that happened. Did early elites at El Hatillo manufacture a local ideology to unite the community under their control? Or, were early elites in the village promoting and reinforcing existing ideas about membership in lineages, political factions, or other social groups?

On the one hand, the evidence for feasting and special treatment of the dead suggests a religious role to the ideological activities surrounding elites and communal gatherings at El Hatillo. On the other hand, these activities emerged somewhat later than the communal gatherings that happened in Area C, which do not appear to have included feasts and which occurred prior to the emergence of the formal cemetery. Further, feasting and mortuary ritual are not inherently religious, at least not in the sense that they routinely manufacture or communicate beliefs about the supernatural. These events can, and often do, emphasize religious or supernatural themes, and in practice blend the religious and the social inextricably. Indeed, apical ancestors are frequently raised to positions of supernatural and mythical standing. Yet, ancestors are not normally recognized as gods, and are not uniformly worshipped as such by living descendants – that is, *ancestors are not ordinarily supernatural*. Rather, mortuary rituals and ceremonies that honor dead ancestors are rooted in kinship and descent relations (Fortes 1965). These events strengthen group identity, such as membership in a lineage or political faction, and remind members of their position within the group relative to other members. This reinforces an internal hierarchy that tends to conserve the institution and promote its continuity (Calhoun 1980; Hardacre 1987 ).

In terms of these distinctions, the communal events at El Hatillo appear to have emphasized themes of social integration and group identity more than expressions of supernatural beliefs. The elites that sponsored these events were probably heads of lineages or political factions that likely competed for power within the village. As heads of competing groups, these individuals had a vested interest in maintaining the continuity and strength of their group, and communal feasts, as noted previously, provided an ideal context for promoting group solidarity. Emphasizing the presentation of copious amounts of food and beverage by using elaborate wares to serve them added to the pomp of feasts, and utilizing religiously charged symbols of group identity to decorate the elaborate serving wares further accentuated unification of the members. Clearly, then, there were religious elements present in these events. But it does not seem likely that religion and ritual practice formed the basis of communal events during any phase of occupation at El Hatillo. If it did, one might expect to see much higher proportions of ritual ceramics, such as censers and effigies like the ones reported for mortuary contexts (see Ladd 1964), among the feasting remains at El Hatillo. As it happened, such ceramics routinely appeared in low ratios compared to other vessel types across domestic and feasting contexts at the site.

### **8.2.3 Late Ceramic Period Archaeological Patterns from Central Panama**

In order to understand precisely how and why authority based on a more social, or secular ideology first emerged at El Hatillo, it is necessary to examine several important archaeological patterns at the supra-regional level (i.e., those from Central Panama outside of the Río Parita Valley). This serves to establish the diffuse cultural traits shared by groups living in this region,



which influenced and helped define the broader social context in which social hierarchies first emerged in the region.

### **8.2.3.1 Mortuary contexts in Central Panama**

The focus on Central Panama's most ostentatious mortuary features by early archaeologists has resulted in an impressive corpus of mortuary data, and widely reported contexts like Sitio Conte, particularly Burial 26 (Lothrop 1937; Mason 1942), the mound burials of El Caño (Verril 1927), and those of El Hatillo (Bull 1965; Ladd 1964). More recent archaeological projects in the region have sought to record important mortuary remains ahead of looters who specifically target such contexts (Cooke et al. 1998; Cooke et al. 2003), adding valuable data from less ostentatious mortuary contexts to compare with those mentioned above. Further, an especially informative analysis of extant data sets (ca. 1988) from Central Panama by Briggs (1989) has established important patterns in the mortuary record for the region. Among the information that has come from these investigations, ample evidence exists to indicate that treatment of the dead formed an important component of activity at all levels of society throughout much of the later prehistoric period in Central Panama (Briggs 1988; Cooke et al. 1998; Linares 1977).

#### ***Cerro Juan Díaz***

Cerro Juan Díaz, approximately 19 km east of El Hatillo, near the mouth of the La Villa River, was an important center of activity in the region, particularly prior to the emergence of regional hierarchical social organization, and remained populated into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Mortuary data from the site suggest both remarkable longevity in the use of particular burial contexts – for example, it is reported that the same context was reused during three separate periods as the final

place of interment for secondary bundle burials (Cooke et al. 1998) – and a resident population that showed little indication of status differences, even after the emergence of hierarchical social organization, based on the relative dearth of more elaborate and complex burials like those of El Hatillo and Sitio Conte.

Cooke et al. (1998) report at least five distinct types of mortuary contexts from the site of Cerro Juan Díaz that include secondary bundle burials, primary burials, and urn burials with infant remains (Cooke et al. 1998:149). There is no evidence of especially elaborate mound burials at Cerro Juan Díaz, like those reported from El Hatillo, El Caño, and Sitio Conte, but tombs containing prestige items were encountered at Cerro Juan Díaz (Cooke et al. 1998). Indeed, one burial dating to the Conte period (Feature 1) included two gold plaques, 400 elongated beads of *spondylus*, and 24 canine teeth of jaguar and puma among the grave goods, and was believed to represent a *shaman* or religious specialist (Cooke 2004b; Cooke et al. 1998; Cooke et al. 2003:117).

The remains from Cerro Juan Díaz suggest that the post-Cubitá, or Late Ceramic II, population of the village was probably not as politically important in the regional social system that emerged around the Cubitá and Conte phases. It is apparent from the mortuary remains at Cerro Juan Díaz, however, that the treatment of the dead was an important social activity that formed a basis for communal identity at the site throughout much of its occupation. This supports the notion that communal rituals surrounding deceased members of society formed a fundamental part of the cultural and social activities in the region. Further, the evidence suggests that these practices, and the beliefs that prescribed them, were deeply rooted in traditions that preceded formal social inequality in prehispanic Central Panama.

### *Sitio Conte*

As noted above, the burials excavated at Sitio Conte (Lothrop 1942; Mason 1942) are the most notable of the region's archaeological remains. The concentration of goods in graves of ostensibly powerful chiefs interred at Sitio Conte was of a scale well beyond that of any other for the region. These remains are often cited as evidence that early chiefs of Central Panama, like their contact-period descendants that met the Spaniards, were engaged in controlling regional exchange of local goods and widespread warfare (Linares 1977; see also Cooke 1984a; Cooke and Ranere 1984, 1992a; Cooke and Sánchez 1997, 2000; Haller 2008; Hansell 1987, 1988, for discussion of evidence pertaining to the control of local resource exchange as primary to early social authority).

The more than sixty interments that were excavated at Sitio Conte have been categorized generally as “large”, “intermediate”, and “small”, with considerable distance separating the “large” and “intermediate” categories. Large graves were typically ten feet deep (3.41 m), contained three or more individuals – up to twenty-two in Grave 26 – and were stone-lined (Lothrop 1942). Individuals in these graves were arranged on levels around the primary interment – all of them were believed to have been interred together, rather than representing reuse of the grave – and each had varying levels of adornment, with the primary individual the most ostentatiously clothed (Lothrop 1937, 1942; Mason 1942). Intermediate graves contained one or two extended individuals within a tomb approximately seven feet deep (2.13 m), and contained similar grave goods to those of “large” graves, but in lesser quantities and lacking larger gold pieces (i.e., plaques, helmets, etc.) (Mason 1942; see also Briggs 1989; Linares 1977). Finally, small graves contained single flexed burials with very few (typically less than ten) offerings (Mason 1942; see also Briggs 1989; Linares 1977).

Aside from detailed descriptions of the mortuary remains, relatively little else is known archaeologically about Sitio Conte. Linares (1977:34,58) reports that “potsherds were strewn over the whole terrain”, but also suggests that habitation at the site was not intensive and that the primary use of the site – as a funerary-ceremonial complex – occurred during the Cubitá and Conte phases. Linares (1977:77) goes on to hypothesizes that Sitio Conte was a regional necropolis, utilized primarily by the elite from several villages, and that any occupation at the site was probably focused on its funerary role, such as producers of fine ornamentation and, perhaps, polychrome ceramics to be utilized in funeral rites for regional elites.

### ***Broader Patterns in the Mortuary Remains of Central Panama***

A broader assessment of mortuary contexts and grave goods in the region, including those from the contexts mentioned here, as well as from Sitio Sierra and Tonosí Valley sites, provide evidence that age, sex, and occupation were the most important bases for determining one’s position socially, prior to the Cubitá phase (Cooke 1984a; Cooke, et al. 1998; Cooke, et al. 2000; Díaz 1999). Further, as Briggs (1989) notes generally for the region, prestige items, such as fine polychromes, which became more common during the post-Cubitá periods, are not restricted to elite contexts, mortuary or domestic. Instead, prestige goods appeared in both elite and commoner burials, albeit in drastically different quantities. Briggs (1989) suggests specifically that high status burials contain greater quantities and varieties of prestige items – gold, *spondylus*, polychromes, polished axes, etc. – rather than particular types of prestige items to indicate their greater status. This suggests to Briggs that prestige was accumulated and status earned by elites in prehispanic Panama. That is, grave goods can be understood as “badges” that reflect various achievements, like success in war and raiding, which is consistent with notions

put forth by Linares (1977) that the chiefdoms of later prehispanic Panama were contingent upon proven abilities.

Based on this evidence, it is clear that mortuary practices formed an important component of the Late Ceramic period societies in Central Panama. A change in these practices occurred sometime during the later Cubitá or early Conte phase and social criteria beyond age, sex, and occupation became important in determining how one was interred, as is demonstrated by the burials from Sitio Conte. While later mortuary contexts – those dating to the Macaracas, Parita, and El Hatillo phases – did not match the scale of “wealth” reflected by the richest burials from Sitio Conte, they were nonetheless elaborate and included large quantities of polychromes, bone jewelry and ornamentation, and a variety of gold pendants (Cook et al. 2003; Ladd 1964). Thus, treatment of the dead was a ritually important part of early societies in Central Panama, but seems to have taken on an even more pronounced role at about the time that social inequality took hold in the region (i.e., late Cubitá/early Conte).

#### **8.2.3.2 “Gran Coclé Semiotic Tradition”: Iconography and Complex Religion**

The elaborate polychrome ceramics that characterize the ‘Gran Coclé’ tradition in Central Panama are among the best known archaeological artifacts from the region, and are commonly reported from excavations of tombs in Central Panama like those reported above (see Briggs 1988; Cooke et al. 1998; Hearne and Sharer 1992; Helms 1976, 1995, 2000; Ladd 1964; Lathrop 1942, 1976). Ideas regarding the symbols that decorate these vessels a religious system lay behind the meaning in their intricate designs. Perspectives on the social function and religious meaning of these symbols have been offered by Cooke (1976, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1998, 2004a, 2004b), Helms (1977, 1979, 1995, 2000), and Linares (1977). Each of these scholars has

presented very convincing ideas about the social role of the emblems, and in the case of Cooke (2004a, 2004b) and Helms (1995, 2000), notions of the meaning and basis of the symbols.

Helms (1979, 1995:5, 2000) has suggested that the richly decorated vessels of the Coclé tradition encode “sociological and especially cosmological concepts that also may have had some bearing upon the ideology legitimizing the status and activities of political elite”. In particular, Helms has argued that these symbols tied elites to mythemes representing the stories of creation and beginnings of society, and the special religious knowledge and authority associated with these ideas (1995:107). Such ideas, Helms (1995) maintains, are central to religion in traditionally organized hierarchical society, and are often expressed through the veneration of ancestors. This is offered as the reason that so many of the elaborate polychromes were buried with elites, whose transformation into ancestors may have been facilitated by the inclusion of the symbols. That is, as Helms (1995:108) argues, the painted symbols contained the information for the mortuary rites that would return the deceased elite to the realm of the ancestors, which she refers to as “the creation of functioning ancestors”. Mortuary rites, which involved the consumption of large quantities of food, *chihca*, and ceramics, the latter of which were ritually killed and deposited along with the deceased. Such patterns seem strikingly consistent with the remains observed from Middens A2 and F2 and El Hatillo.

Linares (1977) and Cooke (1985, 1993, 1998, 2004a, 2004b) have focused more on the role of the impressive Coclé polychromes in the social order of Central Panama, and interpret the symbolism in terms of the animals that are recreated in various ways in the symbols that adorn the vessels. Both authors call attention to the abundance of animal motifs represented amidst a variety of geometric designs, the application and forms of which can be seen to develop through time into increasing abstracted and stylized representations (Linares 1977). Linares (1977)

suggests that the economic importance of the animals typically portrayed to the societies that created the images suggests their symbolic associations emerged from their vital part to the subsistence of Central Panamanian groups. Of course, these motifs are often represented in abstract and stylized ways, clearly indicating that their importance was transformed from the mundane to the religious. For example, particular physical and behavioral traits of certain animals are exaggerated in the art, and, often, traits from different animals are combined to form a mythical being with elements borrowed from several animals, or animal and human elements are combined suggesting shamanistic practices.

Cooke (2004a:114) has called attention to the widespread use of animal motifs and the varied ways in which they are represented and “imbued with ‘religious’ significance” in the art of the Gran Coclé. Animal motifs range from highly natural and realistic to highly stylized representation. Yet, even in highly stylized cases, these depictions can often be identified in terms of species based on particular taxonomic markers (Cooke 2004b). Being able to identify species within Gran Coclé polychromes and investigate the distribution of those species across contexts, particularly domestic ones, permits better insight into the use of particular animals as a resource and establishes a basis for understanding the cognitive associations later Late Ceramic period residents of the region formed concerning particular animals (Cooke 2004a). The latter, of course, relates more directly to meaning of symbols and their religious significance. That is, as Cooke (2004a) notes, the use of specific anatomical elements from different species to create composite creatures can be taken to reflect qualities that were most highly valued or admired in these societies collectively, and which the artists and religious specialists saw fit to emphasize. Through such practice and the development of a semiotic system, particular traits communicated particular meaning. Elsewhere, Cooke (2004b) suggests that particular motifs, whether

representative of an actual animal or a stylized composite creature bearing traits of various animals, and portable art manufactured from bone and teeth of certain species are differentially distributed across mortuary contexts from the region, suggesting that particular animals were associated with particular elements of the society, such as clans, lineages, or specific occupations. Cooke (2004b:281) suggests, given the prominence of the crocodile in the imagery of the region around Parita Bay after 750 A.D., that the increasingly pronounced hierarchies that emerged at this time in the area might have had supernatural associations with the crocodile.

The precise nature and meaning of the symbols and iconography is not entirely within the reach of archaeologists and art historians, but the explanations presented here constitute the most plausible and productive interpretations. Whether totemic imagery linking clans to supernatural gods, or prescriptions for religious rites encoded in symbols derived from local and distant sources, the iconography of Central Panamanian polychromes clearly reflects a semiotic tradition, which itself is indicative of a belief system that formed a vital part of the society. Indeed, as Helms (1977, 1979, 1995, 2005) has long argued, the knowledge and skill required to produce and reproduce such complex imagery in such standard ways might very well have been associated specifically with leadership in these societies. fashion

### **8.2.3.3 Bases of Authority at El Hatillo**

During the earlier Cubitá and Conte phases, the communal celebrations hosted by elites at El Hatillo do not appear to have occurred on the same scale as the later events that produced Middens A2 and F2. This is logical, given the lower population in the village during the early period (see Haller 2008; Menzies 2009) compared to the Parita phase. But it is also likely that the events themselves were somewhat less lavish during early phases, particularly compared to the ceremonial feasts of later phases. Further, it is likely that multiple households at El Hatillo



possessed the rights and abilities to host communal celebrations during these earlier phases, effectively spreading participation out among more households. This scenario eventually gave way, however, to one in which fewer households consolidated social power within the village and became the sole sponsors of communal celebrations.

There is no indication that early elites at El Hatillo enjoyed their elevated social standing for economic reasons, like control over resources or production of particular goods, and there is no evidence that sponsorship of communal events during the Cubitá and Conte phases involved the large quantities of food, beverage, or ceramics as did the later communal feasts. But elite households were distinct from others in the village at this time specifically because they included space with formally constructed features, which was probably devoted to extra-domestic affairs. While they lacked the elaborate banquets of later such gatherings, the communal events hosted by early elites were similar to those hosted by later generations (i.e., Parita phase) of elites because they emphasized the same general themes and sought the same broader social goals. That is, the early versions of communal gatherings at El Hatillo were also probably based on strengthening a shared ideology among the members of the community. Periodically gathering in the household of one member of the community (e.g., lineage head, factional leader, etc.) provided opportunities for members of the group to participate collectively in recognizing the principles that bound them socially, whether those were ancestors and kinship, or simply cooperation among neighbors in basic economic demands. The extra-domestic architecture that set Area C households apart from other contemporaneous households (i.e., Area D) is, indeed, an indication of the elevated social status enjoyed by residents of this area. But the construction and maintenance of such architecture was also a basis for community cooperation that brought together members to collaborate in the production of space and structures that served and

symbolized group membership. As Hastorf (2003) notes for Chiripa, the construction of space and structures for communal ceremonies indicated an increasing role and significance of ancestor worship in the community, but the acts of creating and maintaining these structures also required more participation and cooperation in communal activities by individual members. Thus, the presence of formal space for communal gatherings in Area C is further indication that the Conte phase elites in this part of the village possessed the influence to effectively coordinate and direct cooperative efforts among members of the community toward collective goals.

The importance of space to elite authority is also well illustrated by the case of Paso de la Amada in coastal Chiapas. Lesure and Blake (2002) have argued that early elites at Paso de la Amada engaged in competitions for prestige that are visible archaeologically in the construction of platform residences, which were more elaborate than ordinary village household structures. In most cases, a household maintained a position of authority within the community for a generation or two, but in one case (Mound 6) the authors conclude that the household was able to successfully make the transformation from achieved to hereditary authority based on evidence of ongoing maintenance and expansion of household architecture over multiple generations (Lesure and Blake 2002). The absence at Paso de la Amada of any evidence of economic differences among the households in the community lead Lesure and Blake to conclude further that hereditary status was based on the an ability to host community ceremonies and perform important rights. They suggest the scenario at Paso de la Amada was akin to ethnographic reports of hereditary leadership among the 19<sup>th</sup> century native Nomlaki of California. Nomlaki leaders inherited their authority, but were circumscribed by the wills of their community; they were not necessarily wealthier than others, but their houses were large and formed the social and ceremonial focus of the village (Lesure and Blake 2002:19-20; see also Goldschmidt 1951). The

ethnographic example of Nomlaki leaders, and the archaeological case of Paso de la Amada provide appropriate models of the sort of social importance that early elites had at El Hatillo.

During later phases, elites lived in areas of the village that had been occupied by the first high status residents during the earlier Cubitá and Conte phases (see Menzies 2009). By the late Macaracas through early El Hatillo phases, elites engaged in the construction of mortuary monuments within the formal cemetery adjacent to the places occupied by the founding households, as well as multiple generations of elite villagers. This corresponded temporally with the beginning of large scale feasting at El Hatillo, which was probably related to mortuary events and the commemoration of ancestors, and which was sponsored by elite households.

The continuity in the location of communal events during later phases of occupation, as indicated by Midden A2, which was in use for at least 200 years, indicates that the physical setting of these events was of special importance. Their proximity to the formal cemetery is one indication of the importance of place to the communal events – situating these gatherings on the margins of the tombs that celebrated past leaders must have added to the sanctity of the activities. But the repeated use of this part of the village over generations to celebrate ancestral relations among the community members must have added a separate layer of meaning to the space. These communal ceremonies were special affairs intended to be remembered by all participants, and, within the minds of the residents of El Hatillo, this part of the village was linked with memories of the festive banquets held there. The accumulation of piles of refuse from these periodic celebrations (i.e., Middens A2 and F2) would have helped to delineate this space physically within the village, and probably also became reminders, loosely analogous to monuments, of the events that created them. Finally, the proximity of this space to Household A (45 m west) and the fact that the refuse associated with this household (Midden A1) contained a

remarkable proportion of faunal remains to total sherds, suggest that Household A maintained an ability to sponsor feasts throughout much of the village's peak period.

Parita phase remains from Household A and Midden A2 clearly reflect an increase in participation in communal events compared to the earlier elite contexts. These later remains also suggest that Household A was able to consolidate authority and the rights to host communal rituals sometime around the late Macaracas phase, when the use of Middens A1 (Household A) and A2 began, and maintained that status for 200 years or more. The apparent beginning this period also corresponded temporally with the first mound construction at El Hatillo and the earliest burials within the village's formal cemetery, which lay immediately adjacent to Household A and Midden A2, and partially atop the remains of earlier Cubitá and Conte phase residents. The growth of the village's population and the increase in economic activities associated with elite areas occurred just after the establishment of Household A and the beginning of mound construction.

The construction of mortuary monuments on top of, and adjacent to, the households of the earliest elites represents a sort of physical claim to this space. Such practices are commonly noted in regard to claims on economic resources, like the construction monuments, often funerary in nature, which served to establish land tenure among groups (Chapman 1981; Earle 1991; McAnany 1995, 1998; Renfrew 1983). At El Hatillo, early (Cubitá and Conte phase) elites were not economically superior to others in the village, and claims to early elites by later (i.e., Parita phase) elites were not based on better access to resources. Instead, the delicate manipulation of the existing social structure that permitted one group of higher status residents at El Hatillo (apparently Household A) to consolidate authority within the village must have required a strongly legitimizing factor. The construction of mound burials atop the households

and tombs of the earliest elites and the village's founders might well have provided such legitimacy to this transformation. The formal cemetery seems to have established a permanent claim to a part of the site that was socially, rather than economically, important. Communal ceremonies carried out in the immediate vicinity of these mounds involved more participants and greater varieties of resources consumed on a larger scale than earlier versions of such gatherings. While these communal events probably remained fundamentally focused upon strengthening social ties among members, which would have further emphasized a connection to the early elites and founding ancestors, they clearly involved greater generosity by the hosts, which would have helped to ease any tensions created by the consolidation of power by a single household.

Finally, it is interesting to note the temporal relationship between Middens A2 and F2 with regard to the aforementioned observations. It is clear from these contexts that the communal events associated with Midden A2 ceased at about the time that the events that produced Midden F2 began, which is somewhat surprising in light of the pronounced continuity of communal events associated with Household A. It is even more interesting that this shift in the location communal ceremonies happened quite late in the occupation of El Hatillo. Midden F2, which is very thin compared to Midden A2, contains ceramics that date primarily to the latest phases of occupation (late Parita and El Hatillo phases) and indicate that the events that produced the midden were relatively short lived. The apparent change in host household that is implied by these contexts and the associated decrease in the intensity of communal activities probably reflect a change, or perhaps weakening, of centralized leadership in the village. Finally, adding some credibility to this notion, the events that created Midden F2 ceased altogether at El Hatillo at about the time the village began to decrease in population and apparent importance and nearby sites began to grow (Haller 2008; Locascio 2008).

#### 8.2.4 Summary

During day-to-day interactions, status differences were not pronounced among residents of the village of El Hatillo, especially during earlier phases of occupation. However, the differences between elites and commoners were emphasized under particular circumstances. Specifically, communal gatherings that involved important ceremonies were carried out in extra-domestic space associated within certain households at El Hatillo. Formal inequality probably first emerged among the villagers because some households were able to provide the space for communal ceremonies and fulfill the responsibilities of hosts to promote the unity and continuity of the group. Such a scenario seems to have supported a system that existed for several generations during these earlier phases, in which multiple elite households, perhaps those of lineage heads within the village, provided the space for communal ceremonies.

A clear transition in the social order of El Hatillo is apparent, however, beginning in the late Macaracas phase, and ushers in the period of peak population and, presumably, peak political authority for El Hatillo (see Haller 2008; Menzies 2009). Construction of monumental tombs began in the village at this time, which might have served as an expression of proximity (familial and ideological) to ancestral elites, who probably represented founding households within the village. At the household level, this transition is marked by an apparent consolidation of rights to host communal ritual by a single household (Household A). A notable increase in the scale of consumption and variety of goods during communal ceremonies indicate that the feasting component of communal events became especially pronounced during later periods. Further, new strategies, like those for which evidence becomes more frequent in later contexts (i.e., control of resources, control of production, military leadership, etc.) were introduced by elites soon after the apparent consolidation of power within the site, and likely served to broaden

the base of authority of these later elites, while also attracting settlers to the village from surrounding areas.

While this transition seems to have occurred over several generations, it nonetheless represents a clear disruption and fundamental change in the social order of the village, which ultimately benefitted a small group of elites. Such shifts to the standards and rules that shape social order are not readily permitted within societies, nor readily carried out. It seems that within the society at El Hatillo, the transition was carried out successfully by a single group of elites for two reasons. First, these elites continued the sponsorship of communal ceremonies through provision of space, as earlier elite households had done, while simultaneously emphasizing a close relation to founding ancestors by constructing monumental tombs atop their remains. Second, later elites added an element of generosity to communal ritual events by increasing the scale of consumption during associated feasts. This provided an appropriate context for conspicuous generosity through the sharing of resources, and for expressing messages of shared ideology and group solidarity. Thus, the successful transformation to the social order at El Hatillo required an element that emphasized both inclusive and divisive messages to the broader society. Communal ceremony and the collective construction of space for associated activities certainly reinforced the inclusive notions among the community, while the location of these events within or adjacent to the household of particular elites speaks to the abilities and authority of those individuals to mobilize and maintain group interaction and collaboration.

## **8.2.5 Considerations and Recommendations for Future Investigation at El Hatillo**

The data presented in this dissertation were collected from a series of expanded excavations that sought to obtain more detailed information about the contexts of daily activities within households in the village of El Hatillo, and to better understand what distinguished some households from others within the village in terms of social status. While midden deposits and structural remains were particularly targeted by excavation, it was the former that delivered the most important data. Middens provided chronologically intact information about the types and relative intensities of activities within households at El Hatillo, and established a clear basis for determining that differences between elite and non-elite households in the village were really quite minimal under normal circumstances of daily activities. These differences became more pronounced during later phases and acquired an economic component, but the distinction between elite and commoner at El Hatillo was probably never as dramatic as the differences in elite and commoner mortuary remains might have one believe. Midden remains also revealed changes in the nature of communal ceremonies, with later sponsorship involving the provision of large quantities of high quality foods and ceramics.

Structural remains were harder to come by because they were simply not as visible on the surface, but excavations did manage to identify some structural remains in each area, and substantial such evidence in Areas C and D. In fact, structural remains in Area C, which were visibly much larger than others at the site, provided important evidence that early elites at El Hatillo sponsored communal ceremonies and probably derived their authority through such activities.

Of course, questions remain regarding the nature of social status at El Hatillo, how it first emerged, and what lead to certain changes in the nature and bases of authority in the village. In



fact, several topics can and should be addressed when considering the data and conclusions presented by this dissertation. These will be briefly outlined below and discussed with regard to potential for future archaeological investigations at El Hatillo.

#### **8.2.5.1 Early Communal Space and Architecture**

The large (extra-domestic) architectural remains that set Area C households apart from other Conte phase households (i.e., Area D) bear substantial importance to the conclusions that early elites controlled space for communal ceremonies and probably took on responsibilities of coordinating and managing gatherings among community members. This interpretation would benefit from further research in two specific ways.

First, further excavation the extra-domestic remains should be conducted to better assess size, arrangement and orientation, and any architectural elaboration associated with these remains. It might, for example, be determined that this was a large, multi-roomed structure that combined residential and communal ceremonial qualities (see Adler 1989). Or, these large architectural components might also have been monuments of a sort that defined an open-air space, such as the carved stone columns that line some edges of a paved plaza at El Caño, 50 – 60 km to the north of El Hatillo (Cooke, personal communication). There is little doubt regarding the importance of these features in serving more than simply ordinary household activities. However, better understanding the precise nature of these structures would permit more accurate and detailed conclusions about the activities that they were constructed to complement.

Second, extending broad, household-style excavations to one or two additional areas known to have had indications of higher status Conte residents - namely within the ‘monte’, or vegetated portion of the site, where regional and community scale investigations produced very high densities of the indicators of Conte elites, particularly Conte beige ceramics. This would

provide an answer to whether or not multiple elite households engaged in similar activities (i.e., constructing communal space and hosting communal ceremonies) to elevate their status during the Conte phase. If the households in Area C were unique, then it might be concluded that elites had already begun to consolidate authority within a single household prior to the advent of elaborate mound burials.

#### **8.2.5.2 Excavations of Large Middens Near Area C Remains**

Two large middens could be observed on the site's surface very near to (25.67 m northwest and 27 m northeast) Area C excavations, which closely resembled those from Area A – that is, they were visible as low rises (~ 60 cm) and roughly 16 m x 18 m in area (much of that area attributable to deflation of the middens through time). These middens could not be excavated during household excavations because the field in which they appear was under cultivation and seeds had only recently been planted. Menzies (2009) surface collections on and around these middens produced high densities of Macaracas phase ceramics and suggested likely higher status residents, since high proportions of polychromes and fancy ceramics appeared in the collections. It seems especially likely that feasting and communal ceremonies of the sort that produced Middens A2 and F2 were already underway during the Macaracas phase, and may have been sponsored at that time by a household in a separate part of the site. If this was the case, then it would place the consolidation of social authority and broadening social powers back in time several generations. Further, it would indicate that elites were competing for authority within El Hatillo for much of the site's occupational history, but that particular groups or households were apparently able to achieve and maintain hereditary authority within the village for substantial periods of time (i.e., about 200 years).

In order to assess the contents of these middens and learn the activities that produced them it is necessary to sample them. This would simply require two or three 1 sq m units be placed in each midden and careful excavation be undertaken to ensure that the deposits are recorded accurately and that records reflect depositional events (see below, Microstratigraphic Analysis of Middens). The data collected from these middens would shed light on the nature of elite activities, particularly with regard to changes in communal ceremonies and elite sources of power.

#### **8.2.5.3 Expanded Excavation of Area Around Midden A2**

Midden A2 contained remains that were very characteristic of feasting, and provided some of the best evidence of the nature of communal activities at El Hatillo during later periods. It is concluded that the activities represented by Midden A2 carried on the tradition of elite sponsorship of communal ceremonies that seems to have begun during the earlier Cubitá or Conte phase. Later elites provided greater quantities of foods and fancy ceramics to feasts that became parts of communal events, but no evidence of formal space or structures devoted to these activities was encountered. Since large, extra-domestic architecture within higher status Conte households was the main indicator that early elites sponsored communal activities in the village, it would be expected that formal space or structures also existed as venues for later such events.

It might very well be that the plaza area that existed among the mounds of the formal cemetery, (the center of which lay about 100 m northwest of Midden A2 – note that the edge of the mounds, noted in earlier discussions, is about 45 m – 50 m northwest of Midden A2), provided the communal ceremonial space for feasts. But, it is also likely that Midden A2 accumulated from events that took place in the immediate vicinity. First, Menzies (2009) excavated a higher status Parita burial immediately adjacent to Midden A2, indicating feasts

accompanied mortuary events and funerals of important people, and other such burials could be present, which would contribute to further reconstructing household organization and the nature of social status during later periods. Second, feasts of the sort indicated by Midden A2 are typically associated with special spaces and facilities for the presentation and serving of food, beverage, and other goods consumed during these events (Dietler 2001; Rosenswig 2007). The area around Midden A2, although heavily disturbed, should be further tested by excavations to determine with a greater degree of certainty that such features did not exist in association with feasting during the later phases of occupation, which would lend support to the notion that feasts took place amidst the mound burials in the formal cemetery.

#### **8.2.5.4 Larger Sample of Household Structures**

Sufficient portions of a sufficient number of household structures were excavated at El Hatillo to provide a clear sense of typical styles of construction, including area and layout, throughout phases of occupation. There was no indication that household structures, such as dwellings, varied in size or even in style between elites and commoners during any phase of occupation. Yet, excavating additional structures, including at least one complete structure for reasons of comparison, would lend to further analysis of variations in space across households. That is, additional samples of household structures could: 1) help to more clearly distinguish elements and features of extra-domestic space from ordinary household structures; 2) provide a better basis for summarizing ordinary structural qualities among households and determine the degree of variation among households in the village more accurately; and 3) allow discussions of similarities (or dissimilarities) in elite and commoner household structures to carry forward with greater degree of confidence.

#### **8.2.5.5 Microanalysis of Midden Deposits**

Midden deposits at El Hatillo provided the most useful information for reconstructing household and communal activities throughout all phases of occupation. It was expected at the outset of excavations that middens would provide key evidence of daily life in the village. But concerns over widespread looting and regular plowing of fields at El Hatillo raised suspicion that many such deposits would be badly disturbed. While this was true for much of Area B and part of Area F, middens elsewhere at El Hatillo were intact and undisturbed, and thus provided sound evidence of their origins.

Middens at El Hatillo were excavated in 10 cm levels that followed natural stratigraphic changes – that is, natural strata more than 10 cm in depth were excavated in 10 cm levels to increase sensitivity to changes in the contents of the middens or the nature of its accumulation. Two 2-liter soil samples were also taken from each 10 cm level within middens and wet screened through 1 mm mesh in the laboratory. These methods were believed to enhance the project's ability to identify minute remains, such as fish bone or charred seeds. Very little additional evidence was recovered from wet-screening soil samples, and 10 cm levels of excavation recorded changes in artifact density and transitions in artifact types that reflected the temporal span of events that created the middens, but generally failed to produce clear evidence of depositional episodes across cases that could be used to better understand details of the accumulation of refuse, domestic and ceremonial alike.

Finer scale analysis, or microanalysis, of middens at El Hatillo would be a useful addition to future excavations. Since middens at El Hatillo have proven vital to producing detailed data that reveal activities within households and during communal ceremonies, they should be a primary target of further excavations at the site. This would require that at least one 1 sq m

excavation unit in each midden be excavated in 3 cm levels and all contents wet screened through 1 mm mesh. First, greater attention to fine scale variations in stratigraphy will ensure greater sensitivity to details that permit identification of depositional episodes, such as thin lenses of clean soil that represent brief breaks in use of the midden, or periods of frequent or intense activities, like feasting, versus periods when such activities occurred less frequently or intensely. Second, wet screening the entire contents of the 1 sq m unit, albeit time consuming and labor intensive, will ensure much better representation of faunal and floral material present in the midden. For example, Moore and his colleagues at El Porvenir compared the wet screening method described here with traditional collection methods using dry screening through a 3 mm (1/4") mesh (see Vilchez et al. 2007). Presuming that densities of faunal material were roughly equivalent in each of the excavation units, they concluded the dry screening method missed 91% of the faunal remains present, including some species, like anchovies, that were completely unrepresented by dry screening (Vilchez et al. 2007).

The methods recommended above will improve upon those employed during household excavations at El Hatillo because they are aimed at producing much more detailed data that are better suited to fine scale analysis of activities, and produce more accurate and complete reconstructions of the social processes that led to such activities.

### **8.3 CONCLUSION**

Support for the idea that the chiefdoms of prehispanic Central Panama represent a sort of “*contingent* political system”, as Linares argues (1977:76, emphasis in original), is easily found in ethnohistoric reports, which have been partially corroborated by archaeological data (Briggs

1986; Haller and Menzies personal communication, 2009; Isaza 2007). But it may be hasty to conclude that these societies did not also include more permanent and established bases of power and more lasting authority of leaders.

Some level of competition for political authority clearly existed among elite households and communities that comprised El Hatillo. This competition drove elites to consolidate their authority by aligning themselves with important communal traditions and establishing visible connections (i.e., monumental tombs) to the ancestral sources of such traditions. Later elites sought to broaden their bases of authority, probably by acquiring more control over economic resources as ethnographic accounts suggest, which required them to further emphasize their legitimacy by continuing to host communal ceremonies involving the sharing and consumption of resources during feasts and shared ideologies that emphasized group membership. During later phases of occupation, then, communal events became contexts for chiefs to publically express their legitimacy, power, and “wealth”, while also conveying a generosity and benevolence toward their neighbors and potential challengers. Thus the nature of social authority in the region changed over time based in part on challenges to authority, the foundation of which was rooted in abilities to host communal ceremonies that celebrated ties to founding ancestors. Competition for political authority revolved around established bases of power in the prehispanic chiefdoms of Central Panama, and can be understood to represent a particular style of leadership that involved changes to the circumstances and conditions in which that leadership was expressed and practiced.

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